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The Great Plan of Happiness: The Intersections of the Restored Gospel of Christ and Positive Psychology

Robin Litster Johnson
rlj1085@sas.upenn.edu

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The Great Plan of Happiness: The Intersections of the Restored Gospel of Christ and Positive Psychology

Abstract

Happiness has been the Holy Grail sought by most of humanity for millennia. What it is and how to find it has been discussed and debated since the earliest records of humankind, and has been the object of countless studies by scholars the world over, including those in the field of positive psychology. Several empirically-based theories of happiness and well-being have emerged, and there is much commonality between them. It is proposed here that religion and spirituality are primary sources of happiness and well-being, and that there is much overlap between these sources and the research and practices emerging within the field of positive psychology. One religion in particular, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), shows many broad intersections with positive psychology research and the interventions which contribute to well-being. Examining these intersections may deepen the appreciation LDS adherents feel toward their membership and more fully inform their level of participation. In addition, there are many interventions found within positive psychology which, if learned and applied, may increase the happiness and well-being of members of the LDS Church, and the public at large.

Keywords

atheism, belief, character strengths, church, Christianity, cognitive bias, community, eudaimonia, explanatory style, faith, Gospel of Christ, happiness, happy, health, hedonia, Latter Day Saints, LDS, meaning, meditation, Mormonism, Mormons, positive psychology, relationships, religion, religiosity, resilience, service, spirituality, spiritual practices, thinking traps, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, well-being

Disciplines

Biblical Studies | Buddhist Studies | Christian Denominations and Sects | Christianity | Civic and Community Engagement | Community Psychology | Ethics in Religion | Family, Life Course, and Society | Growth and Development | History of Christianity | History of Religion | Liturgy and Worship | Missions and World Christianity | Mormon Studies | New Religious Movements | Other Psychology | Other Religion | Political History | Practical Theology | Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion | Social Psychology

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The Intersections of the Restored Gospel of Christ and Positive Psychology

Robin Litster Johnson
University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Leona Brandwene

August 1, 2020

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“I am come that they might have life,
and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Christ
John 10:10

“But let us not forget that knowledge and skills alone cannot lead humanity to a happy and dignified life....What humanity owes to personalities like Buddha, Moses, and Jesus ranks for me higher than all the achievements of the inquiring and constructive mind.”

Albert Einstein
The Human Side

“...behind our drive to survive, there is another force, and the best word to describe it is faith. Not just in God, or in science, or love, but faith in ourselves and each other.... Faith is embedded in our neurons and in our genes, and it is one of the most important principles to honor in our lives.”

Andrew Newberg, M.D.
How God Changes Your Brain

“Scientific inquiry is not a replacement for religious understanding or philosophical insights, but...add[s] helpful new dimensions to these age-old sources of wisdom.”

Ed Diener
*Happiness:
Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth*

In the Beginning....

“...All knowledge is compacted into a wisp of matter in the near-absolute zero of hyperspace. The wisp asks itself, ‘Can entropy be reversed?’

‘Let there be light,’ it responds. *And there was light.*”

Martin Seligman
Authentic Happiness

This paper will review the research and practices of positive psychology and their relationship to happiness and well-being. It will examine the evidence-based value and contribution of religion and spirituality toward well-being and happiness, as well as when they sometimes detract from those states of being. It will consider one religion in particular, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sometimes referred to as the restored Gospel or the LDS Church, and its intersections with the research and practices of positive psychology and their connections with happiness and well-being. All of these above-listed concepts will be explained and expanded upon throughout the text. Finally, five specific practices of positive psychology which can greatly enhance the well-being of members of the LDS Church and the population in general will be covered in detail.

Specific LDS canons will be referenced throughout this paper, along with the Holy Bible, King James Version (KJV), which the LDS Church also considers to be holy writ. Appendix A, titled *LDS Terminology*, describes these canons and their origins in greater detail; here is a brief description, along with their titles and abbreviations:

- Book of Mormon (BOM): An ancient record, comparable to the Bible, of a civilization that lived in the Americas from about 600 BCE to about 421 CE. Considered by members of the LDS Church to be of divine origin.

- Doctrine and Covenants (D&C): Modern-day writings considered by members of the LDS Church to be of divine origin.
- Pearl of Great Price (PGP): A compilation of both ancient and modern-day writings, considered by members of the LDS Church to be of divine origin.

The purposes of this paper are three-fold. First, to articulate the psychological and other benefits of religion, including organized religion, and spirituality for those who question their worth or who may not be aware of the depth and breadth of research supporting these domains. Second, to help members of the LDS Church understand the potential positive impact their affiliation with the Church may provide to their emotional, mental, and psychological well-being, enabling them to make more fully informed choices about their engagement with the Church. Third, to give LDS Church members practical, learnable, evidence-based skills to improve their lives. These skills come from in-depth and extensive research in the field of positive psychology and well-being, and could be useful to multiple peoples beyond the Church.

Seeking Happiness

“Even a poor tailor is entitled to some happiness....”

Motel
Fiddler on the Roof

Happiness has been referred to as the Holy Grail of our mortal existence (Lyubomirsky, 2007; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011). Much of humanity across millennia has valued happiness, from the Akkadians inscribing the Epic of Gilgamesh over 5000 years ago (Sandars, 1972) and Aristotle opining in 350 BCE (Melchert, 2002) to the academicians penning peer-reviewed

periodicals (Craig, 2020) and journalists authoring missives for the general public today (Harrar, 2020). Beyond valuing happiness, peoples and cultures the world over have almost continually sought it, and for good reason. Besides feeling good, happiness is connected with other desirable life outcomes, such as social connections, improved health, enhanced academic and professional performance, increased flexibility and creativity in problem solving, and sustained resilience in the face of adversity (Seligman, 2002; Haidt, 2006; Lyubomirsky, 2007, 2014; Fredrickson, 2009; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Heintzleman, et al., 2016; Myers & Diener, 2018). The pursuit of happiness is even etched in the United States' Declaration of Independence, preceded by these bold words "We hold these truths to be self-evident..." (Jefferson, 1776).

It has been posited that "Happiness is central to the assumptions of positive psychology" (Craig, 2020) and that "Helping people find happiness and meaning is the precise goal of the new field of positive psychology" (Haidt, 2006). That goal, as envisioned at the genesis of positive psychology, has since been expanded to encompass all of well-being (Seligman, 2011). Positive psychology, in brief, is the scientific study of what makes life fulfilling, worthwhile, and expansive, such as well-being, character, and having purpose in life (Peterson, 2006). Additional essential elements of positive psychology and its interconnections with religion, spirituality, happiness, and well-being will be expanded upon in subsequent pages.

Religion and Spirituality as Sources of Happiness

It has been long been proposed that religion and spirituality can be a source of happiness (Newberg & Waldman, 2010; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Haidt, 2013; Newberg, 2019), from the scribes of the Vedas, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Old and New Testaments (Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2019) to modern scholars researching multi-faceted spiritual realms today

(Newberg, 2019; Pargament, Abu-Raiya, & Magyar-Russell, Forthcoming). In a systematic literature review by Rizvi and Hossain (2016) covering 115 research papers written on the relationship between religious belief and happiness between 1996 and 2015, they discovered that the “vast majority” (p. 1561) of studies found a positive relationship between religion and the components of life that contribute to happiness, regardless of type of religion, race, gender, nationality. Rizvi and Hossain reviewed the various scales measuring happiness and well-being, such as the Satisfaction With Life scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), and the scales used to measure religiosity, such as the Francis scale (Francis & Stubbs, 1987). They found a “clear consensus” (p. 1562) amongst researchers that people having a backdrop of religion or spirituality in their lives, even those with few physical possessions, were, on average, happier than those who did not. There were a few researchers who consistently found no connection between religion and happiness, such as C. A. Lewis (Lewis, Maltby, & Burkinshaw, 2000), but they were in the minority. The consistent positive connections revealed by Rizvi and Hossain (2016) suggest that combining the wisdom of the ancients with the evidence-based science of the secular may create paths leading to that Holy Grail of happiness.

The Book of Mormon (BOM), a text held sacred by LDS Church members, overtly seeks to guide humanity toward happiness. The phrase “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8) is used in the BOM to describe the teachings and intent of the Gospel of Christ. The concept of happiness is elaborated in other verses, “I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual...” (Mosiah 2:41). Indeed, the word “happiness” is used 27 times throughout the BOM, and the words “happy” and “happier” another 10 times. Here a few examples, in Figure 1:

BOM Reference	Text of Scripture
1 Nephi 8:2, 10, 12	Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision....and it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy...as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy...I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also....
1 Nephi 11: 21–23	And the angel said unto me: Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things. And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul.
3 Nephi 17:16–17	...after this manner do they bear record: The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father...and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father.
3 Nephi 17: 20–21	Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full. And when he had said these words, he wept, and the multitude bare record of it, and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.
Alma 40: 7, 12	And now I would inquire what becometh of the souls of men from this time of death to the time appointed for the resurrection? the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.

Figure 1. BOM Happiness Chart. This chart shows some of the verses in the Book of Mormon that reference happiness or joy.

Similarly, the research and evidence-based practices of positive psychology find common ground with the BOM in seeking to guide people toward, or at least to inform them of, that which can lead to happiness and well-being.

What is Happiness?

“To paraphrase the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, happiness is like obscenity: ‘We can’t define it, but we know it when we see it.’”

Sonja Lyubomirsky
The How of Happiness

The definition, or meaning, of happiness has been sought almost as assiduously as has happiness itself. There may be as many definitions of happiness as there are social scientists, philosophers, and prophets (Melchert, 2002; Ackerman, 2020). To that point, Fredrickson (2009) specifically did not include the term *happiness* in her well-researched “top ten” (p. 39) list of

positive emotions because she felt the word had become so generalized and broad it had lost its potency. Seligman concurred, adding, "...I actually detest the word *happiness*, which is so overused that it has become almost meaningless. It is an unworkable term for science, or for any practical goal..." (Seligman, 2011, p. 9).

Both historically and currently, there are two broad categories of happiness that have been studied, parsed, and pondered by academicians, philosophers, and lay people alike. One is hedonic happiness, which is more temporary in nature and is often equated with momentary pleasant feelings (Melchert, 2002; Ackerman, 2020), and of being primarily focused on experiencing pleasure and avoiding pain (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Singh, Junnarkar, & Kaur, 2016). Eudaimonic happiness, which has been frequently likened to the broader term of well-being, includes having a sense of meaning and purpose in life, living for more than just ourselves, and for more than just momentary pleasures (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2006).

Hedonic Happiness

Hedonic happiness has been espoused as far back as the Greek philosopher Aristippus (Moen, 2015) in the 400s BCE. He proposed that a full and happy life consisted in maximizing the total amount of pleasure available to us, in accumulating as many hedonically happy moments as possible, while also avoiding as much pain and unpleasantness as possible. This viewpoint has been affirmed across the centuries by Epicurus (Duignan & Diano, 2019), Hobbes, and Bentham (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

One current, modified, hedonic perspective is expressed in Diener's model and concept of *subjective well-being* (SWB) (Diener, 1984), which was actually presented 14 years before the emergence of positive psychology as a field. Diener (1984) enlarged the notion of simply having temporary pleasant feelings with his new SWB terminology and model. When beginning the

study of happiness in earnest, he coined the term subjective well-being to use instead of happiness, “to lend it an air of scientific legitimacy to a skeptical academic world” (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011, p. x, in Foreword). However, SWB as measured by Diener’s well-validated Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), is a richer and broader characterization that goes beyond the simple hedonic pleasures connoted by the word “happiness,” and reaches into areas of aspiration and meaning.

Subjective well-being assesses how satisfied we are with our lives, combined with the amount of positive emotion and negative emotion we are experiencing. These three elements – life satisfaction, presence of positive emotion, and absence of negative emotion – constitute our subjective well-being, a scientific term for happiness (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011).

At first glance, it may be tempting to dismiss the notion of hedonic happiness as being short-sighted, somewhat selfish, and perhaps unworthy of our attention. However, Fredrickson’s research on micro-moments of positivity (Fredrickson, 2009, 2014) reveals that even small doses of joy, humor, curiosity, and the like sprinkled throughout our days, weeks, and years are powerful in shaping the flow and depth of our lives. These micro-moments – and even macro-moments – of positive emotions can help us build a deep reservoir of resources, which can then be drawn on in times of adversity (Fredrickson, 2009, 2014). Combined with Diener’s SWB, they add important elements to our lives (Seligman, 2002).

Hedonic treadmill and hedonic adaptation. Differing from micro-moments of positivity and an overall SWB perspective, a simplistic view of hedonic theory erroneously implies the notion that merely accumulating as many good-feeling moments as possible while reducing the greatest number of bad-feeling moments as possible will result in a full, happy life. However, Seligman (2002) suggests that this notion is a “delusion” (p. 7).

The notion of leap-frogging from one happy moment to the next leads to what is known as being on the *hedonic treadmill*, which comes about because of *hedonic adaptation* (Brickman & Campbell, 1971). Hedonic adaptation is the phenomenon where we get used to, or adapt to, pleasant circumstances such that those circumstances no longer provide the same level of pleasure as they did when we first experienced them. As described by Schwartz (2016), hedonic adaptation is akin to a thermometer moving up and down. When something good happens, we feel happy or excited and the mercury in our “pleasure thermometer” rises or perhaps even spikes. However, those happy or excited feelings will eventually fade away, and then we move back down to about the same level of emotion or happiness we had before that good thing happened. For example, when we get a new car, we may feel thrilled to drive it. After a while, though, perhaps even a long while, that “new car thrill” will pass and the car will be just....a car.

This emotional leveling off happens for three primary reasons: we get used to whatever caused the pleasantness to occur; we experience a change in perspective of a situation; and/or because we establish a new standard for and definition of what is pleasant (Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2014; Schwartz, 2016). Adaptation in and of itself is evolutionarily beneficial because it enables humans to endure the vicissitudes of life (Fredrickson, 2009). However, because this adaptation also occurs with enjoyable circumstances, we eventually descend to a similar level of comfort or happiness after a pleasant event as we had before it occurred.

Upon finding ourselves back to the emotional plane where we started, we seek out increasingly pleasurable material goods and/or experiences in order to feel that pleasure spike again, and then again, and then again. When the leveling off occurs, as it inevitably will, off we go once more, seeking another spike. This then becomes what is known as the hedonic treadmill (Brickman & Campbell, 1971), ever spinning in the pursuit of permanent pleasure but never

finding it. The movement of the hedonic treadmill creates the illusion of progress, but, as with the illusion of eating while dreaming, people eventually awaken with an empty stomach, and an empty life. This is why counsel given in the BOM is still relevant, even 2500 years after it was given: “Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy...” (2 Nephi 9:51).

This is not to say that temporary and hedonically-induced pleasant feelings are without value and do not add to our overall well-being. They do add value, with micro-moments of positivity and having a high level of SWB (Seligman, 2002, 2011; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Fredrickson, 2009, 2014). However, if our emotional and psychological diet consists only of, or primarily of, temporary and fleeting pleasures – metaphorical candy bars and cookies, so to speak – without including the dense nutrition provided by eudaimonic engagements, we may find ourselves emotionally and psychologically malnourished despite being surrounded by a banquet.

Eudaimonic Happiness

The second broad category of happiness, eudaimonia, can be as slippery to define as happiness itself. Aristotle used the term eudaimonia for his concept of happiness (Melchert, 2002). He found, however, that while many agreed the good life and successful living included several of the components of happiness, like Justice Stewart, none could agree on the actual meaning of the word (Melchert, 2002). Aristotle bemoaned that “what constitutes eudaimonia is a matter is dispute” (Pawelski, 2013, p. 2), and debates over what makes up eudaimonia and full-throated happiness have continued down to the present day. Many positive psychology scholars describe eudaimonia and long-term happiness as including the broad dimensions of well-being, flourishing, and thriving, and of having a full, satisfying, life notwithstanding – or perhaps even

necessarily including – moments of sorrow and struggle (Seligman, 2002; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Pawelski, 2013; Singh, Junnarkar, & Kaur, 2016).

Eudaimonia embraces the elements that make up many theories of well-being, which will be described in greater depth elsewhere. Some of these elements include autonomy and having a sense of choice and control, mastery of various skills, a high degree of interest and engagement in at least a few areas of life, warm and supportive relationships, a deep sense of meaning and purpose, a willingness and ability to contribute to society, and embracing a broad repertoire of emotions that are part of an authentic life (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Fredrickson, 2009, 2014; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman, 2011). Physical health and vitality are also now recognized as being essential to a life well-lived (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008), and Pawelski went on to further identify three general categories of eudaimonia, which include various arenas of thriving for individuals, for groups, and for society as a whole.

Value of combining the hedonic and the eudaimonic. The tug-of-war between hedonic and eudaimonic happiness is a false dichotomy (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Both contain essential elements that enrich our lives and help us create a “life most worth living” (Peterson, 2006, p. vii). In fact, Ryan, Huta, and Deci (2006) describe “eudaimonic conceptions” (p. 140) as being primarily concerned with the content and processes of living, while “hedonic conceptions” (p. 140) are primarily concerned with the outcomes of living, especially being able to enjoy a full range of positive emotions from day to day.

Even though the constituent parts of hedonia and eudaimonia may conflict from time to time, Ryan and Deci (2001) discovered that, “Evidence from a number of investigators has indicated that well-being is probably best conceived as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes aspects of both the hedonic and eudaimonic conceptions of well-being” (p. 148). With

this evidence in mind, we shall henceforth use the terms happiness and well-being jointly and interchangeably throughout the balance of this paper.

Where are happiness and well-being to be found, and how do we get there?

“They want lives imbued with meaning, and not just to fidget until they die.”

Martin Seligman
Authentic Happiness

Myriad paths to happiness and well-being have been proposed over millennia. However, modern social sciences and 21st century technologies now allow us to pull back the curtain, so to speak, and examine in detail the various components influencing the elusive state of happiness, and its more grounded cousin, well-being. These modern tools allow us to discard some of the well-intentioned but untested theories and dogmas proposed during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Untested Theories of Happiness

Freud and Skinner. Various theories were proposed in the early days of psychology that proved, in the end, to lack merit. For example, despite individual differences manifested by his clients as they lay on his plush Victorian couch during psychoanalytic sessions, Freud theorized that when faced with devastating distress such as extreme hunger, they would all become the same, devolving to a common denominator of selfish self-interest. Freud believed this theory would hold true for all humans, not just his clients (Frankl, 1946). Viktor Frankl disconfirmed Freud’s theory in the concentration camp of Auschwitz. Rather than people sliding toward sameness, Frankl (1946) found instead that the differences between them became all the more stark, as “swine and saints” (p. 178) unmasked themselves. The saints at Auschwitz were often the first to be lost, as they were the ones to share their last scrap of bread to succor a fellow

inmate (Frankl, 1946). The equally untested theories of B. F. Skinner (Seligman, 2002, 2018), such as the supposed irrelevance of character, the influence of environment as the sole agent of change, and “the general uselessness of positive reinforcement in practice” (Seligman, 2002, p. 229), also proved ineffectual when put to the test of empirical scrutiny.

Maslow and the pyramid. One of the most famous and recognizable symbols of a proposed ascent toward happiness and well-being is the hierarchy of needs pyramid, which is inaccurately ascribed to Abraham Maslow. In 1943, Maslow did offer a new theory for motivation and fulfillment, and implied well-being, and continued to revise his theory throughout his life (Bridgman, Cummings, & Ballard, 2019; Kaufman, 2020; Mcleod, 2020). The pyramid was produced by others many years after his theory first appeared (Bridgman, Cummings, & Ballard, 2019; Kaufman, 2019), and those who created it sadly finished it with “self” alone at the top, failing to capture Maslow’s core ideas and ideals – that other people matter, and that society must be involved in creating a positive environment for growth. Maslow emphasized that individual actualization by itself was not sufficient for building a life well-lived (Baumeister, 1987; Bridgman, Cummings, & Ballard, 2019; Kaufman, 2019, 2020; Maslow, 1991). This is similar to sentiments expressed within most major world religions and spiritual traditions, that living a life of “seeking happiness for oneself alone is doomed to failure” (Helliwell, Weijers, Powdthavee, & Jarden, 2011, p. 276) as selfishness has been viewed as a source of unhappiness.

It has been proposed that Maslow’s ideas could be more accurately depicted by a ladder (Bridgman, Cummings, & Ballard, 2019) or a sailboat (Kaufman, 2020), or perhaps a set of undulating swirls, with humanity’s needs moving up and down, and in and out, with the natural flow of life, rather than being fitted into a rigid hierarchical pyramid. Regardless of the choice of metaphor, and despite the less-valid shape and unfortunate ending of the pyramid, the notion that

well-being can be studied and sought for the betterment of humankind reflected the winds of change coming to the world of psychology.

The Birth (Rebirth) of Positive Psychology

In 1998, Martin Seligman's inaugural address as President of the American Psychological Association (Seligman, 1999) called for a shift in focus within the field of psychology. Seligman asserted that psychology had long strayed from its original roots of offering hope while ameliorating despair. He exposed and expounded how the field had sunk into the dark depths of behaviorism and Freudian psychoanalytics and had stayed there, with few rays of light reaching the bottom of the abyss. He challenged his fellow psychologists to return to their roots and begin looking for and studying the good, the beautiful, the hopeful in life (Seligman, 1999). Of equal importance was the need to share that knowledge with the world, for the betterment of humankind. To borrow from LDS parlance, "...for there are many yet on the earth...who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it – therefore, that we should waste and wear out our lives in bringing [it] to light..." (D&C 123:12–13).

Forerunners of positive psychology. To be sure, others had been studying happiness and well-being long before Seligman officially embarked on his quest. Other prominent researchers and their findings were actually forerunners of positive psychology. For example, Ed Diener began writing on happiness in 1972, helped develop the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) in 1983 (Diener et al., 1985), and published his concept of *subjective well-being* (SWB) in 1984 (Diener, 1984). He has since published over 250 articles focusing on well-being and happiness, along with a book on happiness (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011). The SWLS is a well-established and widely used survey, as are his other scales measuring additional elements of well-being, such as the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) and the Flourishing

Scale (FS) (Diener et al. 2010), and both the Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (CIT) and Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT) (Su, Tay, & Diener, 2014).

Another forerunner for the field of positive psychology was Carol Ryff and her 1989 conception of well-being which includes self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. She reviewed and reconfirmed the validity of her concepts in 1995 (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi published his seminal findings on *flow* in 1990, and a fortuitous, serendipitous, and life-saving encounter with Seligman on the beaches of Hawaii in 1997 proved to be the inception of what would become the burgeoning field of positive psychology (Positive Psychology Timeline, 2013)

Advancing the work of Akumal and beyond. Building on the work of early pioneers such as Diener and Ryff, and taking his own challenge seriously of renewing the field, Seligman, along with Csikszentmihalyi, invited 18 young, up-and-coming psychologists to the first-ever conference on positive psychology in Akumal, Mexico (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2011; Mann, 2013), which became known as Akumal I. It was followed the next year by Akumal II. In true revolutionary form, they produced the Positive Psychology Manifesto (Fredrickson, Sheldon, Rathunde, & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). They explored definitions, set goals, and charted applications for this new field of study whose growth would soon prove to be explosive (Mann, 2013; Positive Psychology Timeline, 2013).

Additional proponents of the positive arose (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Fredrickson, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Haidt, 2006; Lyubomirsky, 2007, Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Cameron, 2012; Pawelski, 2013; Duckworth, 2018; Niemiec, 2018), expanding the scientific

study of what makes life worth living, what enlivens and enriches relationships, and what brings optimism to individuals, organizations, and society as a whole (Peterson, 2006).

Theories of Well-being and Happiness

Several highly-validated theories for well-being have emerged since the days of Akumal and include PERMA (Seligman, 2011), Self-Determination Theory (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2006), Broaden-and-Build (Fredrickson, 2009), Diener's expanded components for Subjective Well-Being (Diener et al., 2010), and the Construal Theory of Happiness (Lyubomirsky & Dickerhoof, 2010), amongst many others (Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, 2002; McQuaid & Kern, 2017).

Source	Name of Theory or Scale / Element	RELATIONSHIPS	ACCOMPLISHMENT / COMPETENCE	MEANING / PURPOSE	POSITIVE EMOTIONS	ENGAGEMENT/ PERSONAL GROWTH	AUTONOMY	OPTIMISM	HIGH LIFE SATISFACTION	SERVE OTHERS	HEALTH / VITALITY	NUMBER OF ELEMENTS OUT OF 10
	Total	8	8	7	6	6	4	3	3	2	2	
Su, Tay, & Diener (2014)	Inventories of Thriving	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		9
Diener, et al. (2010)	Flourishing Scale	x	x	x		x		x	x	x		7
Ryan & Deci (2000)	Self-Determination Theory	x	x				x					3
Ryff (1989)	Psychological Well-Being	x	x	x	x	x	x					6
Huppert & So (2013)	Flourishing Across Europe	x	x	x	x	x		x			x	7
Seligman (2011)	PERMA	x	x	x	x	x						5
Keyes (2002)	Mental Health Contin.	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		8
McQuaid & Kern (2017)	PERMAH	x	x	x	x	x					x	6

Figure 2a. Elements of Well-Being Chart, by Element. This chart shows the elements of well-being, by element.

Elements of well-being chart. Figures 2a and 2b compare several prominent well-being theories and scales. Most had comparable concepts but used different names to identify them. All

of these theories and scales include accomplishment and relationships, and almost all include meaning and engagement or personal growth:

Inventories of Thriving (CIT/BIT) – Su, Tay, & Diener (2014)	Flourishing Scale – Diener et al. (2010)	Self-Determination Theory – Ryan & Deci (2000)	Psychological Well-Being – Ryff (1989)	Flourishing Across Europe – Huppert & So (2013)	PERMA – Seligman (2011)	Mental Health Continuum – Keyes (2002)	PERMAH – McQuaid & Kern (2017)
Relationships	Relationships	Relatedness	Relationship	Relationships	Relationships	Relationships (social coherence, integration)	Relationships
Mastery	Competence	Competence	Environmental mastery	Competence	Accomplishment	Environmental mastery	Accomplishment
Meaning	Meaning		Meaning	Meaning	Meaning	Meaning	Meaning
Engagement	Engagement		Personal growth	Engagement	Engagement	Personal growth	Engagement
Self-worth	Self-respect		Self-acceptance	Self-esteem		Self-acceptance	
Positive emotion				Positive emotion	Positive emotion		Positive emotion
Autonomy		Autonomy	Autonomy			Autonomy	
Optimism	Optimism			Optimism			
Respect from others	Respect from others					Social acceptance	
Serve community	Contribute to others					Social contribution	
				Vitality			Health
Life Satisfaction						Social actualization	
				Resilience			
				Emotional stability			

Figure 2b. Elements of Well-Being Chart, by name of Theory or Scale. This shows the elements of well-being sorted by the theory or scale which incorporated and measured that element.

Service, the obscure component. It is interesting to note that only three theories overtly looked at the component of service and contributing to society as a separate element. Much research consistently shows that rendering service and helping others raises our well-being (Smith & Denton, 2005; Haidt, 2006). Post (2005) analyzed and summarized 27 studies on altruism, happiness, and health that took place between 1980 and 2004. His conclusion, simple yet powerful, is that service has positive effects on well-being. For example, in the Oman, Thoresen, and McMahan (1999) study, 2025 slightly older (55 years +) residents were analyzed

over a two year period based on low, moderate, and high degrees of volunteerism – serving altruistically either nowhere, in one organization, or in more than one organization respectively. Those who volunteered for two or more organizations had a 63% lower chance of dying during the study than those who did not volunteer at all; even taking into account factors such as “physical functioning, health habits, and social support” (p. 301), which dropped the percentage down to 44%, this impact of volunteerism was still highly significant.

Beyond longevity, the quality of life is improved upon rendering service. Multiple studies (Krueger, Hicks, & McGue, 2001; Musick & Wilson, 2003) showed better morale, self-esteem, positive affect, happiness, and well-being, along with less depression. In another 2003 study, Schwartz, Meisenhelder, Ma, and Reed (2003) contacted 2016 Presbyterians throughout the United States. The questionnaire that was mailed to them delved into items such as volunteerism, social support, religious engagement, and physical health. After adjusting for various factors, it was discovered that “helping others is associated with higher levels of mental health, above and beyond the benefits of receiving help and other known psychospiritual, stress, and demographic factors” (Post, 2005, p. 68).

Based on these results, it may be prudent to include questions which overtly measure altruism and volunteerism in well-being scales. Some may argue that these measurements are subsumed within other elements such as relationships, engagement, or meaning. However, because the evidence is so strong that appropriate service positively impacts well-being (Post, 2005; Smith & Denton, 2005; Haidt, 2006; Diener et al., 2010), I believe it merits being studied as its own category. As said by Elder Spencer Kimball, former president of the LDS Church, “...the more we serve our fellowmen in appropriate ways, the more substance there is to our

soul....We become more substantive as we serve others—indeed, it is easier to find ourselves because there is more of us to find” (Kimball, 1974).

Dynamic nature of well-being and happiness. It should be kept in mind that a high level of well-being is not a static state at which we arrive and then remain there forever unchanged (Lyubomirsky, 2013). There is no “happily ever after” which is ongoing and invariable. To this end, for example, when pondering Seligman’s PERMA theory for well-being (Seligman, 2011), we should not envision P-E-R-M-A as large red letters nailed to a white wall. Rather, we can think of each letter attached to its own buoy in the ocean. Each will undulate to its own rhythm, as well as rising and falling with the rest of the letters in the general ebb and flow of life.

We will now expand on the notion that religion and spirituality can be sources for finding and creating happiness and well-being, and also investigate instances when involvement with religion may have produced deleterious effects. We will then focus on one religion in particular, reviewing core principles and practices found within the modern-day LDS Church, and examining the intersections between them and the elements of well-being and happiness which have been elucidated by science, and those that are still being proposed and studied.

Religion and Spirituality: Sources of Happiness and Well-Being

“If we pursue only happiness, for example, to the exclusion of spirituality and meaning, we may become hedonists who do not find true well-being.”

Ed Diener

Happiness: Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth

As illustrated in Figures 2a and 2b, social scientists, aided with 21st century scientific approaches, have identified several elements which contribute to well-being and happiness.

These elements include having purpose and meaning, warm relationships, a sense of mastery, competence, and accomplishment, engagement in activities that are personally interesting, experiencing positive emotions and self-acceptance, a sense of optimism, along with autonomy and choice, being of service and contributing to the society, and either having or working toward vitality and health. Combining these elements within our lives may bring a high degree of life satisfaction and *subjective well-being*, a scientific phrase connoting *happiness* and a deep sense of fulfillment (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011).

Elements of Well-Being in Religion and Spirituality

Definition of religion and spirituality. If having the elements listed above in Figures 2a and 2b can increase our happiness and well-being, can they be obtained, broadened, and deepened through deliberate action? Many of these elements are found within the teachings and practices of the world's religions and/or spiritual traditions (Herbrechtsmeier, 1993; Josephson, 2006; Southwold, 1978). Although religion and spirituality have been defined in assorted ways by different social scientists, various definitions include a type of *searching* and of ideas relating to the *sacred* (Lyubomirsky, 2007; Newberg, 2019; Pargament, 2002). While affirming both diverse and common dimensions of religiosity and spirituality, the Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology (Lopez & Synder, 2009), considers religion in the traditional sense, “as a broad individual and institutional domain that serves a variety of purposes, secular as well as sacred” (p. 612). The Handbook (Lopez & Synder, 2009) concurs with Pargament (1999) that spirituality can be defined as “a search for the sacred” (p. 12).

Holding religious beliefs and engaging in religious and/or spiritual practices may increase many elements of well-being, and thus have a direct, positive impact on well-being and happiness. This process was early theorized by Fredrickson (2002), using her broaden-and-build

theory of positive emotions to look at the role religion plays in bringing these elements into our emotional repertoire. In a nuanced fashion, religion and its practices may help individuals find meaning and purpose in life, which meaning leads to positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2002). These positive emotions in turn help create broadened mindsets, which facilitate the building of personal resources. These resources in turn positively influence better health and well-being:

Religious Practices → Find Meaning → Positive Emotions → Broaden Mindset →
Build Personal Resources → Improve Health and Well-Being

To be more specific, Diener and Clifton (2002) looked at approximately 1000 respondents to the Gallup St. Louis Religious Beliefs Survey, drawn by random-digit dialing, and another 1000 respondents to the 1994 World Values Survey, for a total of 2000 participants, and compared their responses regarding religiosity and their level of subjective well-being. The results were small but statistically significant, showing that religiosity had a positive impact on subjective well-being. Further analysis revealed that “the high belief group reported the highest level of life satisfaction” (p. 207), even though the averages for other groups were only slightly lower, except for those who expressed moderate disbelief. They appeared to have the slightly lowest level of life satisfaction (Diener & Clifton, 2002).

In more recent research between religion and well-being, Cohen and Johnson (2017) performed an extensive literature review on the relationship between religion and well-being, referencing over 100 documents, including the World Values Survey from 2009. Their extensive perusal revealed that various dimensions of religion offered numerous paths to well-being (Cohen & Johnson, 2017), and that the majority of empirical data show a positive correlation

between some aspects of religion and various indices of well-being. Cohen and Johnson (2017) indicated that “Religious people report being happier and more satisfied with their lives” (p. 534), and that the relationship between religion and well-being seems to be vibrant and vigorous throughout numerous and varied cultures and contexts. They also acknowledged that the concepts of well-being and satisfaction with life can be defined in different, possibly conflicting ways, and thus have various interpretations. However, in the end, Cohen and Johnson (2017) offered a guardedly positive response, that “religion often, but not always, contributes to human flourishing” (p. 543).

Religious beliefs and spiritual engagements are not unalloyed goods; there are shadow sides to these as well. Cohen and Johnson (2017) as well as Koenig (2009) acknowledge instances where religion can increase unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life, such as when engaging in rituals like fasting or when being concerned that God is angry with oneself. These and other more serious examples will be discussed later.

However, an accumulation of data solidly suggest that religious beliefs and spiritual practices have a direct, positive connection to and influence upon well-being (de Botton, 2012; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Fredrickson, 2014; Haidt, 2006; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Newberg, 2019; Newberg & Waldman, 2010; Smith & Denton, 2005). Not only are religion, spirituality, and positive psychology – and thus well-being – connected, for many people they intertwine, infuse, and mutually sustain each other so as to be almost inseparable (Smith & Denton, 2005; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Haidt, 2013; Newberg & Waldman, 2010; Newberg, 2019). Many concepts found in positive psychology writings are similar to those found within religious canon. This similarity is both frequent and extensive. Here in Figure 3 are a few examples:

Quotes from Positive Psychology	Corresponding Religious Canon
<p>“Love...[is] our supreme emotion.” (Fredrickson, 2014, p. 10)</p>	<p>“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” (1 Corinthians 13:13 KJV)</p>
<p>“Among our birthrights as humans is the experience of the...pleasant feelings of positivity.” (Fredrickson, 2009, p. 16)</p>	<p>“Adam fell that men might be, and men are, that they might have joy.” (BOM, 2 Nephi 2:23)</p>
<p>“I have been working on agency, one way or another...all my life.” (Seligman, 2018, p. 351)</p>	<p>“Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will...for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves.” (D&C 58:27-28)</p>
<p>“The need for autonomy refers to a sense of choice and volition in the regulation of behavior.” (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008, p. 153)</p>	<p>“Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves....” (BOM, 2 Nephi 10:23)</p>

Figure 3. Positive Psychology and Religious Canon Commonality Chart. This chart shows some of the concepts found in positive psychology literature that are also found in religious canon.

As illustrated by these few references, we can find a connection to religion and/or spirituality on almost any page in the annals of positive psychology (Newberg, 2019; Newberg & Waldman, 2010; Pargament, 2002). Even non-believers, or those who do not engage in any overt religious practices, may find value in what religion and spirituality have to offer (de Botton, 2012; Haidt, 2013; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). For example, de Botton posited that religious processes help promote virtue, build community, and inspire great works of art and architecture. Haidt (2013), along with Putnam and Campbell (2010), concurred, adding that those who regularly attend religious services are far more generous with their time in doing volunteer work and in the giving of charitable donations than those who do not. This last point is aptly illustrated in the BOM:

And now, because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need...And thus in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all.... (Alma 1:29-30).

At this point, I am referring to religion and spirituality interchangeably. Later they will be differentiated, as there are those who engage in religious practices without an apparent improvement in their spiritual comportment (meaning they might be unkind or dishonest, despite the teachings of their religion). Conversely, there are many who engage in spiritual practices, but are not religious (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1939) in the traditional sense of the word. They may meditate, which is a clear spiritual practice, have good hearts, and do kind deeds, but they don't actively participate in church-related activities

We shall now consider two of the well-studied elements of well-being found in Figures 2a and 2b and see their connection to religion and spirituality (meaning in life and relationships), and then investigate two elements which were included less frequently as overt components in the theories of well-being (health and vitality, and being of service and contributing to others).

Meaning in life and well-being. One of the core elements included in theories for well-being is having meaning in life, or a sense of purpose. It has long been asserted that having meaning in life is a requirement for survival, and that a lack of purpose can lead to depression and even death (Frankl, 1946; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Seligman, 2011). Something is meaningful if it is followed for its own sake and not necessarily in order to get anything else (Seligman, 2011), and pursuing something meaningful is often fraught with challenge, difficulty,

and frustration. Yet the pursuer persists, with the power of meaning manifesting itself in its very sticking power.

Religion and spirituality as sources of meaning. It is both impossible and inappropriate to dictate to any one person what his or her purpose or meaning in life should be. However, religion and spirituality are potent sources for finding meaning and purpose (Haidt, 2006; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Newberg, 2019; Pargament, Wong, & Exline, in press). Haidt (2006), although an atheist, contends that there is a perception of a vertical dimension to human existence, and that people innately discern a rising “sacredness, holiness, or some ineffable goodness” (p. xiii) in those around them or in nature. That ineffable somethingness pulling us upward, tinged with holiness, can become a source of meaning.

Lyubomirsky (2007) shares that there are some religious and spiritual experiences so powerful that they fill us with overwhelming awe and a sense of having awakened to something of spiritual grandeur. These experiences can bestow deep meaning on our lives. She further suggests that overtly seeking to grow our faith and to ponder the profound questions of life, can, through the very process itself, bring added layers of meaning which enrich our lives.

Newberg (2019) holds that the very essence of religion carries meaning within itself – religion and spirituality are the road, the vehicle, and the occupant of the vehicle, all intermingled. He adds that the rhythms, music, and movements of rituals are a crucial part of making meaning, and that these elements are found within most forms of religious experience. Furthermore, the very functions and integrated neurological areas of our brain allow us to perceive things of a spiritual and religious nature, that we are hardwired for spirituality and sacredness, and for finding and making meaning. In addition, Newberg (2019) explains that most studies show a correlation between people’s religious attitudes and their sense of having a

purpose in life and that “the data suggest that religious faith is a very important source of meaning for many people” (p. 76).

Steger and Frazier (2005) went a step further, illustrating that meaning in life is the link between religiosity and well-being, using multiple regression (p. 575) to ascertain how much the meaning-in-life scores impacted the relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction. First, they queried 508 students in a Midwestern university and established levels of religiosity by measuring outward behaviors such as frequency of church attendance and prayer, and internal components such as having feelings of spirituality and religiousness as expressed by the participant. The participants then completed the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006), which was in press at the time of the study. Steger and Frazier (2005) found that being religious was positively related (p. 576) to both life satisfaction and to having meaning in life. They then found that meaning in life also was positively related to life satisfaction. Looking at the relationships and interplay between all of these constituent parts, they concluded that that “92.3% of the total effect was mediated by meaning in life” (p. 576).

Pargament and colleagues (in press) take another approach, explaining that one of the purposes and features of religion is to bring a sense of wholeness to ourselves and coherence to our journey through life. The process of putting the “bits and pieces” (p. 2) of our lives together in and of itself can create profound meaning. They contend that religious institutions are “uniquely concerned” (p. 2) with that which we consider to be holy, and those organizations help us find wholeness through that holiness (Pargament et al., in press).

Manifestations of meaning. To illustrate with specific examples of finding meaning in religion, O’Connor and Vallerand (1990) analyzed the connection between the type of religious motivation held by elderly French-Canadians (n = 176) and personal adjustments in their nursing

home. Those that had an inner motivation for religiosity had less depression and more life satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of purpose in life, and directly expressed that their religion brought them comfort and meaning (O'Connor & Vallerand, 1990). In addition, two sets of researchers from the University of Geneva in Switzerland reported that 71% of patients with schizophrenia (n = 115) felt that their religious faith and activities brought them a sense of hope and meaning to their lives (Huguelet, Mohr, & Borrás, 2006; Mohr, Brandt, Borrás, Gilliéron, & Huguelet, 2006).

In another example, elderly adherents to particular faith traditions (e.g. Christians or Jews) were less likely to die in the 30 days before an important religious holiday (e.g. Christmas/Easter or Passover/Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur) than after the holiday. A seminal study by Idler and Kasl (1992) examined the impact of religious involvement on the timing of death in the elderly. The study included 2812 people over the age of 65 who were living independently in New Haven, CT. They were chosen from three living areas – public housing for the elderly, private housing for the elderly, and those living in various places in the community. The participants were initially interviewed in person in 1982, then by telephone in 1983 and 1984, and then in a culminating in-person interview in 1985. The interview survey questions covered various aspects of religious activity and depth of belief, as well as components of physical and mental health. The area of New Haven at that time was a mixture of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish, and the participants came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Mortality records of this cohort were kept from the beginning of the study until 1989, and by January of that year, 1037 has passed away.

Although this particular study did not connect religious participation and overall mortality, a fascinating pattern emerged as the researchers studied the data. First, as noted above,

they found that among Christians, there were fewer deaths during the holidays of Christmas and Easter and the 29 days preceding them, than during the 30 days after. This was true whether the holidays were measured separately or together, for men or women, or for the highly religiously active or those that were less so. (The only exception were less observant white Protestants at Easter.) These results are “very strong” (Idler & Kasl, 1992) and statistically significant.

A similar though not identical pattern emerged amongst Jewish adherents, called the “Passover pattern” (Idler & Kasl, 1992, p. 1071) where observant Jewish men were less likely to die before religious holidays, but Jewish women were *more* likely to die before the holidays. The researchers surmised that different levels of participation in the holiday rituals themselves by men versus women created a higher “psychosocial investment” (Idler & Kasl, 1992, p. 1071) for men toward the holiday rituals, spurring the will to live.

Therefore, in both the Christians and in the devout Jewish men there appears to be a link between the value of the holidays and the adherent’s time of death. Newberg (2019) proposes that the religious holiday means something vitally important to them – if only to be with a gathering of kith and kin once more – to merit holding onto life a bit longer (Newberg, 2019).

Another compelling example of the power of the sacred is revealed by the communes founded in 19th century America. There have been approximately 3000 *utopian experiments* throughout history (Sosis & Bressler, 2003, p. 4), the vast majority taking in the United States, and most predominantly in the 1800s. On average, religiously-based communes lasted about 35 years, where those based on secular notions lasted about seven years. Extensive analytic research by Sosis and Bressler (2003) revealed that “religious communes are between 2 and 4 times more likely to survive in every year of their life course than their secular counterparts” (p. 4). While there are various proposals and explanations to account for this phenomenon – cost/benefit

analysis, costly signaling theory, solving the free rider problem (Sosis & Bressler, 2003) – the end result was the same. The researchers themselves concluded that a shortcoming of the various theories proposed by themselves and other researchers is “their failure to capture some critical elements of religious belief that distinguish it from belief in a secular ideology” (p. 17).

Even atheists and agnostics concede this point (de Botton, 2012; Haidt, 2006, Seligman, 2011), that religion and spirituality can elevate us above our everyday concerns and help us find a purpose, a meaning, a “why” beyond the mundane, or even within the mundane, or within the vicissitudes of life which beset us from time to time. As eloquently expressed by Seligman (2002), a meaningful life is finding and becoming engaged in something larger and loftier than ourselves, and the more expansive that something is, the more meaningful our lives will be. Oftentimes that “something” is rooted in religion and spirituality, and thus starting the search there may prove fruitful for the seeker. In sum, Koenig (2009) declares that:

Religious beliefs provide a sense of meaning and purpose during difficult life circumstances that assist with psychological integration; they usually promote a positive world view that is optimistic and hopeful; they provide role models in sacred writings that facilitate acceptance of suffering...and they offer a community of support, both human and divine, to help reduce isolation and loneliness. Unlike many other coping resources, religion is available to anyone at any time, regardless of financial, social, physical, or mental circumstances. (p. 285)

Relationships and well-being. Another core element included in theories for well-being is relationships. Positive relationships are some of the most potent factors for finding and creating happiness and well-being (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Lyubomirsky, 2013; Warren,

Donaldson, & Lee, 2017). In fact, Reis and Gable, as quoted by Peterson (2006), asserted that warm relationships could likely be “the *single most important* source” (p. 261) of well-being in a variety of arenas, and that this holds true across cultures and eras. Concurring with and adding to this assessment, Diener (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011), who has overtly studied happiness for at least 50 years, emphasized that relationships are a core component of flourishing, with decades of research pointing to the conclusion that strong relationships are a prime source of happiness.

For example, in a study conducted by Diener (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011), the researchers collected information on people’s moods throughout the day using the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In ESM, participants responded to alarms that went off at random times throughout the day, noting their mood and their circumstances each time the alarm went off, and indicating whether they were alone or with others. Diener had hypothesized that introverts would feel happier when they were alone. However, contrary to his hypothesis, this was not the case. The introverts were only slightly less positive than extroverts when with others, and were much less positive when they were alone. Although the extroverts spent more time with people overall, the introverts still derived much of their positive moods from being with others (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011).

In addition to the emotional and psychological benefits of relationships as indicated above, positive relationships impact other critical aspects of our existence, such as physical health (Lyubomirsky, 2007; Murthy, 2020), strong communities (de Botton, 2012; Murthy, 2020; Putnam, 2000), and economic prosperity (Vespa & Painter, 2011; Zagorsky, 2005).

Relationships and social capital. For example, Zhang, Anderson, & Zhan (2011) have studied social capital, which can be thought of as the value and importance of positive relationships within groups (bonding social capital) and between groups (bridging social capital).

They performed an analysis of the relationship between bridging social capital and economic well-being. The study looked at 3198 randomly selected participants who had been part of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) longitudinal survey, which was conducted over two time periods, 1987-1988 and 1992-1994. Bridging capital was measured by the level of activity in various volunteer organizations within a community. For economic status, the researchers looked at personal income (which included a variety of items) and income-to-needs ratios. Because the Survey covered subsequent time periods, it allowed the researchers to view changes to individuals' economic status. When controlling for other factors, Zhang et al. (2011) observed that bridging capital "has substantial impacts on economic well-being at the aggregate level" (p. 136), that positive relationships can enhance our well-being in multiple ways.

Religion and the formation of relationships. What role can religion and spirituality play in the formation and maintenance of relationships? First, in the formation category, most religions hold worship or meditative services where individuals gather together to learn of sacred doctrines and their applicability to everyday life. They also provide opportunities for us to be in fellowship with each other, and to be spiritually fed. According to de Botton (2012), a decline in looking out for our neighbors and associating with them corresponded to a decline in attendance at community worship services. Indeed, coming together in worship may break down social barriers, create a sense of community and belonging, and give us opportunities to see and hear those who are similar to us alongside those who are different, all bound together in commonality of spirit (de Botton, 2012; Haidt, 2006).

The singing of hymns, moving, chanting, or other group worship activities may help spark what is known as *positivity resonance* (Fredrickson, 2014), which increases well-being and connectivity. Positivity resonance is a phenomenon that takes places between individuals and

incorporates shared positive emotions, a mutual synchronicity between two or more people's behaviors, and a sense of mutual care for one another (Fredrickson, 2014). These components are inherent within many worship services, and naturally emerge as a function of their structure.

In addition, attending a particular congregation on a regular basis may help us develop a sense of group identity and of belonging to something greater than ourselves. The major world religions span millennia in time and are found on every continent, allowing us to connect to those in attendance, to those around the world, and even backward through time (Diener & Biswas-Diener 2011).

Looking at this concept of identity and belonging from a different angle, and taking a more granular look at the benefits of bridging social capital discussed above, bridging capital can be further divided into *identity-building* social capital and *status-building* social capital (Wuthnow, 2002, p. 669). While we will not go into detail on this concept, status-building social capital may provide opportunities for those with fewer resources to become connected to those in a community who have resources such as “power, influence, wealth, and prestige” (p. 670). These types of connections, as explained elsewhere by Smith and Denton (2005), may be helpful for people to find employment, become more economically stable, gain greater access to information about education or medical resources, and obtain help during a personal or family crisis (Wuthnow, 2002). After extensively analyzing data from the Religion and Politics Survey conducted amongst 5603 participants in 2000, Wuthnow (2002) concluded that “membership in a religious congregation is generally associated quite strongly and positively with status-bridging social capital” (p. 678). While we certainly do not suggest that anyone join a religious community for the purpose of increasing status-building social capital, it is fair to point out that in some circumstances, this may be a positive unforeseen consequence of religious involvement.

Religious and spiritual practices help maintain relationships. Spiritual practices such as meditation and prayer help change and calm our brain functioning and reduce our tendencies towards anger and violence (Newberg & Waldman, 2010; Newberg, 2019). Anger generates a flood of neurochemicals which reduce the functioning of our frontal lobes, lessening our ability to reason. These neurochemicals also destroy the areas of our brain that manage our emotional responses. Through prayer and meditation, we can stimulate blood flow to our frontal lobes and anterior cingulate, which calms upset feelings in the emotional centers of our brains (Newberg & Waldman, 2010).

Spiritual practices also help strengthen the neural circuitry in our brains which is connected to empathy and compassion, increasing our capacity to experience and maintain these positive emotions. Experiments have demonstrated that long-term meditators have much greater activity in the area of the brain where compassion is generated, and also show an increase in “high-frequency brain activity called gamma waves” (Helliwell et al., 2011, p. 280) in areas of the brain connected to empathy and other positive emotions. Compassion and empathy are two important emotions needed for peaceful co-existence with others. Spiritual practices also increase our ability to take action for relieving suffering, in response to those emotions of compassion and empathy (Newberg, 2019; Newberg & Waldman, 2010). As adroitly expressed by the Apostle James:

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone....I will shew thee my faith by my works. (James 2:14–18, KJV)

In addition, the spiritual principle of forgiveness may help heal wounds, mend rifts, and bind hearts and souls together (de Botton, 2012; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Newberg & Waldman, 2010). Forgiveness may increase meaning in life and prosocial behavior, and decrease anxiety and depression (Warren & Donaldson, 2017). When we learn to forgive, we are less likely to ruminate on past hurts and plan revenge. We are also “less likely to be hateful, depressed, hostile...and neurotic. [We] are more likely to be happier, healthier, more agreeable, and more serene...[we] are more capable of reestablishing closeness” in our relationships (Lyubomirsky, 2007, p. 172). Institutionalizing forgiveness on an organizational level may positively energize and inspire entire groups of people in organizations (Cameron, 2012), including congregations.

Despite the numerous benefits of relationships, and evidence that humankind needs relationships to survive, dealing with other people also produces stress, heartache, and a wide range of profoundly unpleasant feelings (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Lyubomirsky, 2007, 2013). In fact, Sartre proclaimed that “Hell is other people” (Sartre, 1987). From time to time, we may assent to that viewpoint. Nonetheless, societal punishments still considered the most severe today are those where we are isolated from others, or are cast out of our community (Haney, 2018). It is now commonly held by social scientists, among others, that we are biologically hardwired to need relationships (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Fredrickson, 2014; Seligman, 2011). Applying religious and spiritual principles and practices to our relationships may help ameliorate some of the inevitable interpersonal challenges which arise therein.

We have examined two of the most-studied elements which impact well-being – a sense of meaning and relationships – and we now turn our attention to two elements which have not been overtly included in a comparable number of theories for well-being: health, or vitality, and being of service, where we contribute to society in either large ways or small.

Health, vitality, and well-being. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine in detail the myriad mechanisms by which physical health or vitality impacts our well-being, the mind-body connection is well-established (Faulkner, Hefferon, & Mutrie, 2015; Ratey & Hagerman, 2008; Ratey & Manning, 2014; Shusterman, 2006). As Ratey and Manning (2014) expressed, there are many emotional and psychological disturbances that manifest themselves physiologically, such as “digestive issues, impotence, poor immune response, high blood pressure, elevated heart rate, tense faces” (p. 221). By engaging in exercise, physical activity, and self-care, these and other unhealthy mental states such as depression, anxiety, and stress may be alleviated. In addition, symptoms of ADD/ADHD may be reduced, and coordination, memory, and other components of aging may be improved (Ratey & Manning, 2014). Ratey and Hagerman also found a strong correlation between overall fitness and well-being (2008).

This connection of health and well-being was demonstrated in a study of 5131 civil servants in London which began in 1985 (Sabia, Kivimaki, Shipley, Marmot, & Singh-Manoux, 2009). The participants were given a series of cognition tests, along with measurements of their Body Mass Index (BMI), an indicator of obesity. The participants were about 25 years old when the study began. They were tested and measured again at about age 44, and then again at about age 61. Across a lifetime, those who were underweight or obese at the last testing performed more poorly on the cognition tests. Those who were underweight or obese at the second and third period of testing also did poorly, indicating an accumulative negative cognitive effect of being unfit over a lifetime.

There are some who may question that because this study examined cognition, perhaps it does not entirely suggest a link between health and well-being. However, in adding to this link, a study (Davis et al., 2015) done through the Vancouver Falls Prevention Clinic (n = 229) looked

at cognition and well-being, amongst other things, utilizing the ICECAP-O survey and the Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA) survey. These surveys directly examined the relationship between these two components, cognition and well-being. ICECAP-O stands for *ICEpop CAPability measure for Older people* (ICECAP-O, n.d.), and it looks at well-being in a broad sense, not just physical health. While the numerous details of the study are beyond the scope of this paper to discuss, Davis et al. (2015) found that “MoCA, a measure of cognitive function and executive function, was significantly associated with wellbeing” (p. 6). It was proposed that those with higher cognition are better able to accomplish the behaviors and functions that lead to health and well-being.

Expanded concepts of physical health and well-being. Faulkner, Hefferon, and Mutrie (2015) concur with this, expressing it more broadly with the “somatopsychic principle” (p. 208) which posits that physical activity has multiple functions which positively impact well-being: preventative function, therapeutic function, quality of life function, and a “feel good” function (p. 212). As with Ratey and Hagerman (2008), and Ratey and Manning (2014), Faulkner et al. (2015) found that physical health is a fundamental component of well-being.

Shusterman (2006) expands this concept even further with his development of *somaesthetics*, a concept which intertwines the body and the mind with the cultural and environmental realities they occupy. He affirms other researchers in the field of mind-body connections, emphasizing that our interior mental processes cannot be separated from our physical processes. Indeed, the physical elements of brain and nerve and gut help create our mental processes, and our environment and culture in turn affect our physical body as it occupies time and space (Shusterman, 2006).

Religion, spirituality, and physical health. How are physical health, religion, and spirituality intertwined? In the New Haven study referenced above (Idler & Kasl, 1992), those who were actively engaged in their faith community were less likely to become disabled, or to become more disabled, over the three year course of the study. Regardless of other influencers such as exercise, weight, and general attitudes, being “publicly involved” (p. 1066) with one’s faith community positively, significantly, and independently improved the participants’ ability to perform the regular tasks of daily living (Idler & Kasl, 1992).

Numerous other studies also confirm this concept, with statistics that have been small but significant (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011), that those who attend religious services are healthier (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Haidt, 2006; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Newberg, 2019; Newberg & Waldman, 2010), including having lower rates of heart disease, blood pressure, emphysema, cirrhosis, and digestive, circulatory, and respiratory disorders (Newberg, 2019). Church-goers tend to live longer. Some propose that this is because those committed to a faith tradition tend to engage in fewer risky behaviors, many of which are prohibited by their religious beliefs (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Haidt, 2006; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Newberg, 2019; Newberg & Waldman, 2010).

Others propose a direct connection with attendance at church itself. A meta-analysis of studies done on the relationship between attending religious services and rate of death between 1994 and 2009 determined that attending church helped reduce the rate of death by 18% in populations that were healthy (Lucchetti, Lucchetti, Koenig, 2011). Lucchetti, Lucchetti, and Koenig investigated the impact of church attendance as compared with other health practices known to improve mortality, such as eating fruits and vegetables. They chose 25 well-regarded health practices and looked at medical databases with meta-analyses of these practices where the

analyses included data on mortality. They looked for similar studies done on religiosity and spirituality. Lucchetti et al. chose 25 meta-analyses regarding health practices and 3 meta-analyses regarding religiosity and spirituality. While looking at the most conservative results, they found that going to church had a bigger impact on mortality than 60% of the other health practices. It was comparable to eating fruits and vegetables, and stronger than statin therapy (Lucchetti, Lucchetti, Koenig, 2011). Therefore, there appears to be a large, significant, and direct positive connection between attending church and longevity. Other researchers have come to similar conclusions (Li, Stampfer, Williams, & VanderWeele, 2016; Idler, Blevins, Kiser, & Hogue, 2017).

For example, coming back to the Oman et al. study (1999) on volunteerism and mortality rates, it was found that "...Unexpectedly, volunteering was slightly more protective for those with high religious involvement and perceived social support. After multivariate adjustment, any level of volunteering reduced mortality by 60 percent among weekly attenders at religious services" (p. 301) over those who did not regularly attend church services.

In addition, many spiritual practices, even when disentwined from religious rituals and meaning, have been shown to improve important neural connections and functions in the brain which may increase physical health (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Newberg, 2019; Newberg & Waldman, 2010). Indeed, the connections between religion, spirituality and health are so extensive and numerous, Newberg (2019) asserts that, "It is remarkable that the medical establishment does not stand up and take notice of these studies" (p. 69) when there appears to be substantial data supporting these positive relationships.

Service and well-being. Another less-included element in the theories of well-being which we will now examine is that of altruism: being of service and contributing to society, be it

on a wide-spread global scale or simply in our own neighborhoods. As stated elsewhere, research consistently confirms that being altruistic, rendering appropriate service, and helping others may positively impact our well-being (Smith & Denton, 2005; Haidt, 2006; Newberg, 2019; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). A long-term study, *Americans' Changing Lives* (House, 1995), collected from the data of 2681 individuals at two different periods of time (1986 and 1989), indicated a strong relationship between volunteering and well-being, that “volunteer work indeed enhances all six aspects of well-being and, conversely, people who have greater well-being invest more hours in volunteer service” (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001, p. 115).

Among the elderly, this was especially pronounced, with those within that cohort who gave greater service manifesting a greater sense of fulfillment in life, more determination to live fully, with less depression and anxiety than those who did not extend themselves through service to their fellows (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001).

Religious engagement and volunteerism. What impact does religion itself have on volunteerism? It has been consistently shown that involvement with a religious community correlates with higher rates of volunteerism, and a commitment to volunteerism over time (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001; Wilson & Musick, 1999). Wilson and Musick (1999) also found that church members were more reliable volunteers, independent of their level of activity in actual church attendance.

Wilson and Musick (1999) analyzed data from a panel survey, *Americans' Changing Lives*, which was conducted in 1986 (n = 3617) with a follow up in 1989 (n = 2867). The participants were interviewed in their homes by the Survey Research Center, and were asked a number of questions such as their level of education, occupational obligations, social interactions, church attendance, and number of children. They were also asked if they had done

any volunteer work in the previous 12 months. Information from those who answered affirmatively for volunteering (n = 1232) were used for the Wilson and Musick study (1999). Wilson and Musick (1999) created 13 hypotheses regarding volunteerism, and while it is beyond the scope of this paper to enumerate them all, only one hypothesis was not supported by the data. Interestingly, the hypothesis not supported was that those who placed a high monetary value on their service would be less likely to discontinue their service. People continued volunteering whether they perceived a high monetary value of their labors or not. Wilson and Musick concluded that one possible reason for this is that people are “reluctant to think of their benevolence in [monetary] terms and to calculate the opportunity costs” (p. 263). It appears, then, that their service was genuinely altruistic, a gift from the heart.

Religious institutions and volunteerism. Wilson and Musick (1999) and Thoits and Hewitt (2001) all concluded that the structure of church as an institution most reliably and most strongly facilitated the kinds of social connections, internal motivations, and concrete, readily available avenues for giving service and volunteering in a multitude of good causes. Therefore, we may safely suggest that if volunteerism increases well-being and that volunteerism is more pronounced amongst those who attend church, then this is another reason that active religious participation can have a positive impact on well-being.

The Value of Organized Religion

This leads directly into our next area of discussion, where we will unlink religion and spirituality, and look at our involvement – or lack thereof – with formal, organized, religious communities. Several studies show a decline in attendance for organized religious services over the last several years (Diener, Tay, & Myers, 2011; In U.S., Decline of Christianity, 2020;

Sumpter, 2019). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze why this is the case, there are compelling arguments for being active within a faith tradition.

Benefits to the individual. Statistically, in addition to the data described above relating to health and volunteerism, those who attend church tend to be happier, more forgiving, more tolerant, more educated, and wealthier. (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Haidt, 2006; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Newberg, 2019; Newberg & Waldman, 2010). In trying to determine the reasons for these desirable life outcomes that accrue to church-goers, several components have been identified (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011; Lyubomirsky, 2007). These include having religious beliefs that bring comfort and peace, a strong social support network within the congregation, a feeling of being connected to something enduring and important, and engaging in rituals that are meaningful. Diener and Biswas-Diener (2011) declared that the experience of going to church and participating in its rituals creates an experience set apart from and different than everyday life, which can lead to increased feelings of well-being.

In delving further into these connections, the extensive Landmark Spirituality and Health Survey (Krause, 2013), funded by the Templeton Foundation in conjunction with the University of Michigan and conducted between 2013 and 2014, used in-person interviews (n = 3010) to glean information on the participants' spiritual and religious practices. Several health biometrics were also captured with weight, height, and blood pressure measurements, along several health indicators from blood samples, such as cholesterol and C-reactive protein, which can indicate heart and circulatory system diseases. The purpose was to determine to what degree and in what direction do spiritual and religious practices intersect with health metrics. As indicated elsewhere in this paper, many studies show positive correlations between religiosity and health; this Survey (Krause, 2013), and the many analyses springing from it were and are investigating causation.

One analysis (Lucette, Ironson, Pargament, & Krause, 2016) used results from 1696 of participants who had at least one chronic illness. Those with chronic illness tend to suffer from depression at greater rates than those without chronic illness. However, those exercising greater religiosity and/or spirituality had 16% fewer signs of depression. The factors impacting this seemed to be a general sense of meaning and hope, along with feelings of peace. Other factors with slightly smaller impact were going to church, having a specifically religious sense of meaning and hope, and a positive perception of God. Even though the effect from church attendance was smaller than other influencers, it had an impact nonetheless. Interestingly, the only religious practice in this particular study that did not reduce symptoms of depression were prayer (Lucette, Ironson, Pargament, & Krause, 2016).

In another analysis of a less studied notion, sanctification of life, Krause, Pargament, Hill, and Ironson (2016) looked at the relationship between it and a general level of health. They hypothesized several linear and interrelated components that may be diagrammed thusly:

Attend Church → Develop sanctified view of life → Increase compassion → Provide more emotional support to others → Increase sense of meaning in life → Enjoy better health
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Using data from 2932 of the Landmark Survey participants, Krause et al. (2016) found positive and significant correlations supporting each node of their hypothesis diagram, especially in the initial link between church attendance, with its “direct and indirect effect,” (p. 669) and developing a sanctified view of life. Krause et al. (2016) affirmed that “a sanctified view of life is fostered in religious institutions and this sense of the sacred forms the basis for more specific religious beliefs (i.e., compassion)” (p. 669).

Benefits to youth and the family. In terms of parenting the rising generation, Diener and Biswas-Diener (2011) further suggest that "...there appears to be something about growing up religiously that aids happiness" (p. 125). This "something" was analyzed extensively by Smith and Denton (2005) in the National Study of Youth and Religion overseen by the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (National Study for Youth and Religion, 2001) from 2001 to 2003. Researchers conducted 3370 telephone interviews throughout the entire country with parents and youth, for 30 minutes and 50 minutes respectively, who were selected with randomly-generated telephone numbers. From these telephone interviews, 267 respondents were chosen for face-to-face interviews in 45 states. The interviewees represented a wide range of religions (including those who did not profess to any religion or sense of spirituality) age, gender, race, language, (English or Spanish) and socioeconomic status. This project appeared to be the most comprehensive and detailed study to have taken place up to that time (Smith & Denton, 2005).

While the religiously active youths themselves had difficulty articulating the positive impact religious activity had on their lives, the researchers (Smith & Denton, 2005) found that the differences in life outcomes for actively religious versus non-religious youth were positive and were "significant and consistent across every outcome measure examined" (p. 218). These measures included whether youth engaged in risky behaviors (e.g. drug, alcohol and cigarette use; promiscuity, use of pornography), the quality of relationships with family and adults, community engagement and volunteerism, levels of moral reasoning and behavior, media consumption, and emotional well-being. In ferreting out whether the relationship between religion and these positive life outcomes for youth was causal, Smith and Denton concluded "with confidence" (p. 219) that the relationship was, in fact, directly causal. Detailed statistics are found in Smith and Denton's Tables 34 – 38 (pp. 222 – 226).

For example, in looking at *religious ideal types* (p. 222), the percentage of *Devoted* youth who drank alcohol weekly was zero, while the *Disengaged* youth was 14%. The percentage of *Devoted* youth who viewed pornography or X-rated websites once a week or more was zero, while for *Disengaged* youth it was 8%. The percentage of *Devoted* youth who felt good about their bodies was 54%, while for *Disengaged* youth it was 29%.

Furthermore, there were nine sociological factors providing benefits to religiously actively youth, even though these benefits were not overtly perceived by the youth themselves: moral directives, spiritual experiences, role models, community and leadership skills, coping skills, cultural capital, social capital, network closure, and extra-community links (pp. 240-249).

In addition, children whose parents attend regularly attend worship services are up to 50 percent more likely to attend college than similar children whose parents do not attend (Putnam, 2015). The positive impact of religious involvement on youth is profound and continues to be studied (National Study, 2001; Smith & Snell, 2009; Smith, 2011).

Benefits to the community. As detailed elsewhere, attending church is positively linked to volunteerism (Krueger, Hicks, & McGue, 2001; Musick & Wilson, 2003; Post, 2005; Schwartz, Meisenhelder, Ma, & Reed, 2003). Increasing church attendance in a community could potentially increase volunteerism within that community, allowing it to reap the benefits.

Another phenomenon emerging is the connection between patterns of church attendance and socioeconomic life, as it is manifested in the growing U.S. class gap (Putnam, 2015). According Putnam (2015), the percentage of college-educated families that attend church on a regular basis has been rather steady for several decades. However, church attendance has decreased by almost a third by those with only a high school degree or less. This phenomenon

increases the unequal stratification in class that was less pronounced in prior generations (Putnam, 2015). Perhaps attention could be paid to the elements influencing this phenomenon, and actions taken to help reverse this trend.

For another example of the positive financial impact religion has on communities, in the first documented quantitative estimates of the economic value of religion to U.S. society, Grim and Grim (2016), found that by assessing the “fair market value” (p. 2) of the products and services contributed to society by religious organizations, including the economic value of businesses with religious roots, religion adds over \$1 trillion to the U.S. economy each year. This is consistent with the economic outcomes predicted by religious involvement, as indicated in the Old Testament:

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:10–11)

Objections to Religion

“The error of modern atheism has been to overlook how many aspects of the faiths remain relevant even after their central tenets have been dismissed.”

Alain de Botton
Religion for Atheists

Despite the tangible benefits that accrue to individuals and societies engaging in religious and spiritual practices, some are still skeptical (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), and others so ardently

disbelieve that they actively strive to exterminate religion from society (Dawkins, 2006; Dennett, 2006; Harris, 2006; Hitchens, 2007). There appear to be multiple perspectives behind this, among them that religious belief is a form of mental illness (Fox, Cashwell, & Picciotto, 2017; Magnus, 2020), that religious beliefs and practices are damaging to society (Haidt, 2006; Kettell, 2016), that some have used religion as an excuse for violence, coercion, and political power (Newberg & Waldman, 2010; Oaks, 2016), and that some religious leaders and adherents have been criminal in their abuse of children (Capps, 1995; Chirban, 2014; Terry, 2008).

Religious Belief as Mental Illness

The concept that religious belief is a sign of mental illness is centuries old (Kettell, 2016), but we will only examine the roots that extend back to Marx, and that then thread their way up through Nietzsche, Freud, Skinner, and beyond (Fox et al., 2017). In fact, the Marx-Nietzsche-Freud trio are known as the masters of the *hermeneutics of suspicion* for their ability to read into various texts seemingly nefarious concepts not apparent to anyone else (Bryan & Landon 2013; Robinson, 2020). The profound influence of this foursome brought countless told into the ranks of the unbelievers. Their influence extended to entire countries that abandoned and eventually tried to abolish religion. Figure 4 shows a composite sketch of this quartet:

Name	Date of Life	Location	Famous Quote	Attitudes Toward Religion	Source
Marx	1818 - 1883	Germany	"Religion is the opium of the people" (sometimes translated to "opiate of the masses")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opponent of supernatural belief - The notion of God is incoherent and pointless, so the question of God doesn't need to be raised - It devalues humans to be subordinated to anything that operates outside of their influence 	Wills (2019)
Nietzsche	1844-1900	Germany	"God is dead...and we have killed him"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Enlightenment so thoroughly secularized society that God no longer had a place in it - Society was unaware that many ideas or traditions within it had originated in religion, another indication of the death of God - Did not believe the Christian God had been successful in redeeming society, and viewed the death of that God as an opportunity to create a new world of love and goodness. 	Magnus (2020)
Freud	1856 - 1939	Germany	Religion is a "universal obsessional neurosis"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religion was a serious enemy to science - The notion of religion was an infantile desire to be protected by an all-powerful father figure - Mystical/spiritual experiences were manifestations of illusions and the most urgent wishes of mankind, e.g. wanting to return to sense of unity with mother 	Küng, (1979)
Skinner	1904 - 1990	United States	God is nothing more than "the archetype pattern of an explanatory fiction"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Had several emotionally negative experiences with religion as a child - Believed humankind did not have will or choice, everything was determined through behavior, no room for God - Spirituality is irrational - Thought science could create a better world than religion - Toward the end of his life, he became wistful about spirituality, although he still rejected religion 	Chirban, (2014)

Figure 4. Chart of Key Atheists, 19th and 20th Centuries. This is a chart illustrating the brief background and beliefs of key atheists in the 19th and 20th centuries, and sources for this information.

In examining Figure 4, the first three of these ardent atheists lived primarily in Germany from 1818 to 1939 and advocated the overthrow of religion, believing that atheism and science could bring about world peace.

Another argument along this religion-as-mental-illness front stemmed from the prominent religious dogma at that time which viewed this life only as a preparation for the next, and which diminished the value of life in the present moment. The incentive to avoid punishment in the afterlife was used by some as the only, or primary, incentive for good behavior in this life, and as a means for some leaders to suppress the lower classes. Goodness for its own sake was not valued nor perceived as a reward. This, the atheists believed, reduced the necessity, merit, and provisions for enjoying life and for working to have a good life in the here and now (Kettell, 2016). Although the value of living a good life in order to simply have joy in the present moment seems obvious to the modern-day reader, this was not a core context influencing religion during the days of atheists centuries ago. Add to this the visage of a vengeful God (Chirban, 2014), and religion seemed, for many, to lose the succor it should have had, and once might have had.

For others, religious observance was used as an excuse to avoid dealing with the contemporaneous problems and inequities of this life. Instead of taking direct action to solve society's ills, such as poor sanitation or inadequate education, religious, social, and government leaders would instead direct people's attention to the life hereafter, distracting them from the distressing situations which those leaders themselves should have ameliorated. Under the guise of a belief in a better life in the future, they sought to absolve themselves of the duty to improve the situation at hand. They used religious observance as a rationalization to allow unnecessary suffering in the present (Cline, 2019; Magnus, 2020).

Elements of this still manifest themselves today in a phenomenon called *spiritual bypass*, as explained by Fox et al. (2017). This is a strategy used by some when faced with difficult and painful life situations. Instead of facing them squarely and, in the process, develop important and valuable emotional, mental, or psychological strengths – which may become spiritual strengths –

people use a false sense of spirituality to numb themselves to or avert themselves away from the painful situation. This phenomenon is observed by psychologists and therapists who see it in their patients (Fox et al. (2017).

As a preventative to spiritual bypass, the research and practices of positive psychology promote well-being in the here and now, regardless of whether one holds a belief in a hereafter. For example, as Pargament explicated elsewhere in this paper, adopting positive patterns of religious coping, rather than avoidance or diversion, may result in additional desirable life outcomes on multiple levels (Pargament, 2002). The principles and practices of the restored Gospel of Christ also support attaining well-being in this life, while still sustaining a belief in a hereafter. Happiness is to be found now, in this present life, as well as in the next:

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people... and every man did deal justly one with another...therefore there were not rich and poor.... And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness....For the Lord did bless them in all their doings; yea, even they were blessed and prospered...and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. (BOM, 4 Nephi 1: 15, 2, 3, 18, 16)

However, in spite of the many psychologically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually healthy strategies for living described here and elsewhere in this paper, atheism still abounds.

Religious Belief as Damaging to Society

In the last two decades, others have advanced the arguments of atheism, in particular Dawkins (2006), Dennett (2006), Harris (2006), and Hitchens (2007). They have led the charge

for what is known as the New Atheism (Haidt, 2013; Kettell, 2016). Spurred by the atrocities of 9/11, they consigned almost all religions to the same category with little or no differentiation between those with generous views toward humanity and those without. Similar to the atheists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this new quartet advocates that religious ideas are illusions and delusions that prevent individuals from fully adopting the progress brought about by science and scientific principles.

Religion, the New Atheists assert, keeps people from following the progressive ideals they believe would be more useful to humankind than those proposed by religions (Haidt, 2013; Kettell, 2016). They contend that religious rituals and practices are inefficient, non-productive, hostile, and “wealth-consuming” fantasies (Haidt, 2013, p. 252) that have no value whatsoever to humankind and society. Newberg and Waldman (2010), point out, however, that these critics of religion make no distinction between the many varieties of religious expressions, lumping ardent and sometimes violent fundamentalism together with liberal theologies. In so doing, they fail to examine counterfactuals to their argument, resulting in un-nuanced, hasty, and inaccurate conclusions (Haidt, 2013; Kettell, 2016; Newberg & Waldman, 2010).

The New Atheists claim that religion gives no direct benefit to individuals or to groups. They propose that religions which survive and even thrive from one generation to the next do so through a parasitic strategy: a parasite will cause the host organism to do something harmful to itself because that action enables the parasite, not its host organism, to survive. It is true that some have used a religious platform and religious connections to spread hatred (Balleck, 2018), to promote themselves instead of God (Wright, 2011), and to commit fraud (Kammer, 2018; Turley, 1987). However, the notion that all or even most religionists are parasites does not hold up to scrutiny. Per Campbell and Putnam (Haidt, 2006), “By many different measures religiously

observant American are better neighbors and better citizens than secular Americans – they are more generous with their time and money, especially in helping the needy, and they are more active in community life” (p. 267). Similar findings were echoed by Smith and Denton (2005).

The New Atheists also assert that religion is harmful to one’s overall health. Newberg, a neuroscientist and Director of Research at the Marcus Institute of Integrative Health at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital (Newberg, 2019) finds the evidence lacking for such proposals. The opposite has been found, with most research in psychology and other sciences converging on evidence that religiosity is either neutral or beneficial (Koenig, 2009; Krause, 2013; Lee & Newberg, 2005; Lucchetti, Lucchetti, & Koenig, 2011).

Why atheism persists. Despite the name *New Atheism*, atheism in general is not new to this century, nor to this millennium (Kettell, 2016). Substantial traces of it have existed as far back as the Greeks, where the word itself finds its origins: *atheos* (godless). In addition, the categories of complaints by the New Atheists are not new (Kettell, 2016). Bertrand Russell, in 1927, described Christianity as “the principal enemy of moral progress in the world” (Kettell, 2016, p. 1), despite the fact that religionists have been partners and leaders on most of the world’s major moral reform movements, such as abolition, improving women’s and children’s work conditions, and, more recently, the civil rights movement (Haidt, 2013, Oaks, 2016).

Why do the accusations of atheists persist across millennia despite evidence continually reemerging to the contrary? Stark (1999) and Stark & Finke (2000) have written extensively and significantly on this topic. It is well beyond the scope of this paper to do justice to their findings by discussing them in detail. In brief, however, Stark and Finke (2000) contend that atheism has existed almost as long as religion itself. LDS theology concurs with this (see PGP, Moses 5:13). Modern atheists were intent on drawing comparisons between religious beliefs and the beliefs

held by primitive cultures. They believed that members of primitive cultures were mentally inferior and by linking religious beliefs to those primitive cultures, religion would then be discredited as being inferior as well.

However, the scholars who were opining at that time on primitive cultures had never actually met the peoples of those cultures in real life and had never studied them “in the flesh.” “Once trained anthropologists came face-to-face with the objects of their study, the primitive mind notion collapsed under irresistible contrary evidence” (Stark & Finke, 2000, p. 8). Like the trained anthropologists meeting so-called primitive people for the first time and finding them to be quite intelligent after all, so, too, are scientists of all stripes finding that religion has much to offer in the way of study and benefit (de Botton, 2012; Haidt, 2013; Stark & Finke, 2000).

While the accusations against religion and protestations of the current generation are similar to what has been argued in past millennia, there are new elements undergirding the New Atheists, including political activism. They desire to solidify their legal rights protecting their positions and a platform to share their views, as well as to build cohesion amongst their followers. These goals been greatly aided by the internet (Kettell, 2016).

Why religion persists. What has stymied social scientists who believed that science would have destroyed religion long ago, is that not only has religion not gone away, it has become stronger than ever, suggesting that a plethora of angles, ideas, and relationships connect religion in a positive fashion to various aspects of society. The difference is that now there exists a cache of tools with which to study religion and its impact on humankind.

Religious Belief as Justification for Violence

There are tragic instances throughout history where religion has been used as a tool to excuse violence and political coercion, such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, and Jewish

pogroms. These are horrific atrocities committed in the name of religion. However, the notion to revile and destroy all religion in general because of these instances is illogical and unjustified, for there have been far more atrocities committed against humanity that were unrelated to religion, and that in fact were specifically opposed to religion, than those that were related to religion (Newberg & Waldman, 2010; Oaks, 2016). Scores of millions, for example, were killed by ardently atheistic communist regimes led by the likes of Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Pol Pot (Courtois, 2015):

- Stalin: 20 to 60 million (Ghosh, 2013)
- Mao Zedong: 25 to 45 million (Johnson, 2018)
- Pol Pot: 2 million (Khmer Rouge, 2018)¹
- North Korean regimes: 2 million from famine alone (Crossette, 1999)

As stated by Cavanaugh (2009), secular philosophies and organizations can be just as violent, “absolutist, divisive, and irrational as those labeled religious” (p. 8). Furthermore, most of the people involved in modern-day suicide bombings did not have strong religious underpinnings. Instead, their acts were politically motivated, or were reactions against social injustices inflicted on their countries by outsiders (Kassim, 2008; Newberg & Waldman, 2010).

In addition, the practice of religion could actually diminish the amount of violence expressed, as the “research shows that the majority of spiritual practices suppress the brain’s ability to react with anger or fear” (Newberg & Waldman, 2010, p. 11). Therefore, using the

¹ I personally worked with and ministered to Cambodian refugee parents and children in Santa Ana, California for two years, starting in 1987. I heard first-hand accounts of the atrocities committed against them by the communist government. See *When the War was Over* by Elizabeth Becker and *To Destroy You is No Loss* by John Criddell.

misfortune of violence enacted in the name of religion as a rationale for eliminating religion is not warranted by the evidence. Given the suppressive effect that religion has on brain activation, the elimination of religion could, presumably, lead to more violence.

Abuse in the Guise of Religion

When children are abused within the context of religion, this is a crime, and the harm coming from such abuse far outstrips the benefits that might have come from the influence of religious involvement. Most obvious and shattering are the physical abuses of an intimate nature between priests, pastors, rabbis and the children and youth whom they were commissioned to nurture. The damage ensuing from such abuse can be lifelong and extremely difficult – and for many, impossible – to remedy (Fogler, Shipherd, Clarke, Jensen, & Rowe, 2008).

Next, there are those that abuse children in a spiritual context, using badly misunderstood religious concepts as weapons against these children. Many of the atheists originally discussed above endured such abuses at a tender age by those purporting to be religious (Chirban, 2014; Cline, 2019; Küng, 1979). They struggled even into adulthood against the effects of that abuse. Lesser-known conversations with them reveal wistful yearnings toward the spiritual (Chirban, 2014; Cline, 2019) even though the language they used to describe God and organized religion was derisive, and rightly so, given this context. As ironically noted by Skinner, one of the failures of some organized religious institutions was becoming so focused on maintaining their internal structures and scaffolding of belief that they overlooked the primary purpose for which they existed – to succor, inspire, and elevate the human soul (Chirban, 2014).

Skinner recounts his grandmother telling him that children who tell lies are thrown into a hot, coal-filled fire after they die. He sought reassurance from his father, but his father concurred with the grandmother. Says Skinner, “Not long afterward I did tell a real lie to avoid punishment.

I remember lying awake at night sobbing, refusing to tell my mother the trouble, refusing to kiss her goodnight. I can still feel the remorse, the terror, the despair of my young heart at the time...I suppose I have never recovered from that spiritual torture" (Chirban, 2014). Another moving example was shared by Alice Miller as she watched very young children at a Christmas celebration being told their virtues and vices by Saint Nicolas. He begins with their vices, provided to him by their mothers ahead of time. However, when he gets to their virtues, the children are too shamed and frightened to absorb the mention of any virtues (Capps, 1995), robbing them of any positivity the event might have engendered.

Misinterpretations of scripture create the conditions in which religious engagement can have a deleterious effect. However, as Newberg and Waldman (2010) point out, "...the problem isn't religion. The problem is authoritarianism..." (p. 11). Those who hold the image of vengeful, critical God can be more prone to depression and anxiety, and other spiritual pathologies (Newberg & Waldman, 2010). There are numerous verses which point to a loving, supportive God, and tapping into those images instead may be helpful. Here are some examples:

Source	Reference	Text from Scripture
KJV	Isaiah 53:4-5	Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...and with his stripes we are healed.
KJV	John 8:10-11	Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.
BOM	Alma 7:11	And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.
BOM	1 Nephi 1:15	I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.
D&C	D&C 93:45	I will call you friends, for you are my friends....
D&C	D&C 29:5	Lift up your hearts and be glad, for I am in your midst, and am your advocate with the Father....
PGP	Moses 7:28, 29, 32, 33, 37	And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon...the people, and he wept; and Enoch bore record of it, saying...: How is it that thou canst weep...? The Lord said unto Enoch:...in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency...and also given commandment, that they should love one another...but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood...wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer?

Figure 5. Chart of a Benevolent God. This chart gives examples from various canon showing a benevolent God.

The Shadow Side of Religiosity

While acknowledging the claims brought by atheists against religion, there can emerge a shadow side to religiosity. First, our mere presence within a religious building does not automatically ensure that, upon departure, we will behave in ways which exemplify the moral teachings espoused therein. Our behavior often underperforms our knowledge. This tendency was aptly lamented by Alma, a prophet in the BOM, “O my son...when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words” (Alma 39:11).

Second, there are teachings found in some religious congregations which are based on fear, anger, and hostility. In these instances, the problem is not religion itself as a category, but rather notions of intolerance, prejudice, separateness, and extreme ideologies which encourage hatred (Newberg & Waldman, 2010). Fortunately, groups that hold these notions are in the minority, and most religious leaders espouse and emulate principles of goodwill and mutual concern (Newberg & Waldman, 2012; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020).

Third, there are individuals who have animosity and negative viewpoints toward their clergy leaders and/or other members of their congregations. These people also can experience greater depression and poorer health when attending church (Newberg & Waldman, 2010). Their animosity seems to fall into a negative pattern of religious coping (Pargament, 2002).

In order to bring light to the shadow sides of religiosity, strategies will be described in the *Enhanced Well-being: Applying the Research and Practices of Positive Psychology* section of this paper which may ameliorate the unintended ill effects of religious involvement.

The Overall Value of Religion

Notwithstanding the shadows cast by the theological disfigurations described above, and others that may emerge, de Botton (2012), an affirmed atheist, concedes that religion can:

serve two central needs which continue to this day and which secular society has not been able to solve with any particular skill: first, the need to live together in communities in harmony, despite our deeply rooted selfish and violent impulses. And second, the need to cope with terrifying degrees of pain which arise from our vulnerability to professional failure, to troubled relationships, to the death of loved ones and to our decay and demise...religions [are] repositories of a myriad ingenious concepts with which we can try to assuage a few of the most persistent and unattended ills of secular life. (p. 12-13)

The Restored Gospel of Christ: “The Great Plan of Happiness”

“As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become.”

Lorenzo Snow

President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1898 – 1901

We have reviewed the history of happiness and well-being, the principles and practices of positive psychology, and the role religion and spirituality can play in helping individuals reach these desired states. We shall now narrow our focus to one religion in particular: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Passages within its holy writ refer to “the great plan of happiness” (BOM, Alma 42:8). What is this Great Plan of Happiness, and how does it correspond to the research found in positive psychology and the evidence-based practices of well-being?

Origins of the LDS Church – Ancient and Modern

LDS Church theology (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d.) posits that its origins began primordially, that all humans were first born as spirit children to a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother in a pre-earthly realm, that these Heavenly Parents have physical

bodies, but are in a state of glory and perfection and operate in dimensions incomprehensible to the finite human mind; LDS doctrine does not consider Them to be supernatural² per se, but considers Them to be divine. LDS doctrine teaches that these spirit children lived with their Heavenly Parents until they were sent off to “school.” That school is Earth, where each person is born into a physical body, makes choices, forms relationships, and learns vital lessons and skills, all of which are necessary in their eternal progression to become like their Heavenly Parents.

The role of Christ. LDS doctrine teaches that Christ, as the Son of God, suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane and died on the cross for humankind’s transgressions, enabling them, on conditions of repentance, to return back home to their Heavenly Parents. LDS doctrine holds that Christ was literally resurrected, and that his resurrection enables all humankind to be resurrected. This is what LDS members consider to be the Atonement of Christ – He completely absolved the Fall of Adam and Eve (see Appendix E), overcame mortal death for all through a literal resurrection, and overcame spiritual death by enabling humankind, through repentance, to be reunited with their Heavenly Parents.

This, according to LDS doctrine, is the Gospel of Christ – the Great Plan of Happiness.

LDS theology holds that heavenly beings taught the Gospel of Christ to Adam and Eve, who taught it to their children. They believed these teachings, then stopped believing, due in part to Satan’s influence, and the message was lost. A new prophet was called to restore the Gospel message to the earth. This cycle of falling away and restoration continued down through Christ.

² As an analogy, children play “telephone” by talking through two cans tied together with a string. Today we have the iPhone 11. Is the iPhone 11 “supernatural” compared to the tin cans? No, it just advanced technology. LDS theology holds a similar notion toward the Heavenly Parents.

The restoration of the Gospel of Christ. LDS doctrine teaches that Joseph Smith was called as a prophet to restore Christ's Gospel in its fullness to the earth after much of it was lost after the death of Christ's Apostles. As a youth, while seeking divine guidance to know which church to join, Joseph experienced a heavenly manifestation:

I saw a pillar of light...which descended gradually...when the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description....One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said...“This is my Beloved Son. Hear Him.”

LDS doctrine holds that, through a series of divine manifestations, Joseph Smith restored Christ's Gospel to the earth, bringing forth additional sacred canon, and that the LDS Church has been continuously led by a series of prophets who receive direct communication from Heavenly Father and Christ in guiding the Church and its members.

Aligning the restored Gospel and positive psychology. We shall now examine how the principles of the restored Gospel of Christ and practices of the modern-day LDS Church align with positive psychology's research on well-being and happiness. Then we will explicate additional research from positive psychology, showing how it can help LDS Church members, and the public in general, have even greater happiness and well-being.

The Restored Gospel of Christ and Positive Psychology: The Overlap with Principles of Well-Being

We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

Joseph Smith
9th Article of Faith

As evidenced by the growing consensus among scholars regarding the common elements found within well-being, as summarized in Figures 2a and 2b, social scientists and positive psychology practitioners (Diener et al., 2010; Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, 2002; McQuaid & Kern, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011; Su, Tay, & Diener, 2014) have found at least 10 core components that are part of well-being, happiness, and a life worth living. These include, in alphabetical order:

Accomplishment (Competence) • Autonomy (Agency) • Engagement • Health (Vitality)
High Satisfaction with Life • Meaning (Purpose) • Optimism • Positive Emotions
Relationships • Service (Contribute to Society)

Unfortunately, it is well beyond the scope of this paper to discuss each of these elements in depth and examine how they all intersect with the principles of the restored Gospel and the practices of the LDS Church. Instead, I shall focus on four that I consider most salient: Autonomy, Meaning, Relationships, and Service. The remaining six are covered in an abbreviated fashion in Appendix D.

Autonomy / Agency

Science: Autonomy is the option to govern one's own behavior and choose one's path through life (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). The notion of *personal agency* is first discovered in infancy and then waxes and/or wanes throughout life as various levels of the *sense of control* are perceived and experienced (Maddux, 2009). Autonomy is overtly listed as one of the three primary elements comprising the triumvirate of psychological needs within self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Personal agency and a sense of control, both being components of

autonomy, are core to psychological well-being (Maddux, 2009), and when people have a greater sense of autonomy, choice and self-direction, their internal motivation toward any given project or process is strengthened (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Autonomy and self-regulation were emphasized in Brown and Ryan's (2015) seminal treatise on self-determination and self-regulation, with autonomy being vital to both self-determination and long-term, sustained self-regulation. Autonomy and the ability to choose is intertwined with self-regulation, and Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, and Oaten (2006) affirm that people with high self-regulation enjoy more positive life outcomes in a variety of domains. These outcomes include social growth and the internalization of prosocial values and behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

There are concerns that a high degree of autonomy will engender emotionally detached independence and selfishness; however, autonomy as understood within self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), as well as psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989), the mental health continuum (Keyes, 2002) and the inventories of thriving (Su, Tay, & Diener, 2014), is the sense that personal choice and individual volition can be a part of any endeavor.

In analyzing a subset ($n = 2,810$) of the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce, Thompson and Prottas (2006) found that employees with a high sense of autonomy over a job – some amount of choice in how and when assignments are to be done – were more likely to be content with their “jobs, family, and life in general” (p. 101), were less prone to be job-shopping, and had less stress and conflict over the balance between work and family life. Even more salient was the discovery that job autonomy strongly and positively impacted the employees' attitudes about their work itself. Employees with a high sense of autonomy had a higher degree of well-being and a better ability to successfully manage their work and home responsibilities

(Thompson & Prottas, 2006). Similar results showing the relationship between the presence of enhanced well-being and autonomy were found amongst nursing home residents (n = 50) (Kasser & Ryan, 1999) and two different sets of students, the first involving 193 (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997), and the second involving 67 (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, Ryan, 2000). Autonomy, then, is a crucial element worth fostering for optimal well-being.

Scripture: Autonomy, agency, and choice are preeminent and profoundly fundamental principles of the restored Gospel. LDS doctrine holds that the very essence and efficacy of our mortal existence hinges on the premise of autonomy (See Appendix E – Eve). Numerous verses from LDS canon attest to this: “Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him... I caused that he [Satan] should be cast down...” (PGP, Moses 4:3) “...and also a third part of the hosts of heaven turned he away from me because of their agency...” (D&C 29:36). “...Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself....And because that [humankind] are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon...” (BOM, 2 Nephi 2:15, 26). “For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant....men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves...” (D&C 58:26-28).

Practice: From the time LDS children enter the Nursery in Primary (see Appendix A) at age 18 months, they are taught the concept of autonomy and making good choices through songs, artifacts (e.g. arts and crafts, Choose The Right “CTR” rings, etc.), and lessons. As another example, *Choice and Accountability* are part of the Young Women (see Appendix A)

values which they recite at almost each gathering. The theme of choice and agency – autonomy – is found throughout all the teachings of the restored Gospel, in hymns (Hymns – Topics, n.d.), lessons (Study – Topics, n.d.), and conferences (General Conference, n.d.).

Meaning / Purpose

Science: Meaning is having a cause or motivation toward something that is larger than ourselves, often for the betterment of humankind (Seligman, 2002). The importance of meaning as a component of well-being was explicated above (p. 29). Steger (2018), after reviewing 70 years of research of “meaning scholarship” (Abstract), concluded that “...the weight of this research seems to make clear that asking whether meaning is related to well-being is no longer an interesting research question....a better question may be whether it is possible for people to experience well-being without meaning” (Abstract). Indeed, seven out of the eight theories of and scales for measuring well-being discussed earlier (See Figure 2a) included having meaning or purpose in life. This alone should give us pause, pondering its importance. Viktor Frankl’s book *Man’s Search for Meaning*, which was written in 1945 in a little over a week, has never been out of print, has sold over 16 million copies, has been translated into more than 50 languages (Frankl, n.d.), and was ranked as the 10th most influential book in America by the Library of Congress³ (Fein, 1991) can be thought of as a monument to meaning.

Scripture: The essential message of the restored Gospel – that we are children of Heavenly Parents and that this mortal journey is a step along the road in becoming like them – is ripe with meaning. “And this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and

³ Interesting to note that The Book of Mormon ranked #8 on this list.

eternal life of man” (PGP, Moses 1:39). That we can share this message of hope and strength with all those around us overflows the cup of meaning.

Practice: The teachings of the restored Gospel of Christ can be shared with every person, and can be done in a variety of ways, including the use of modern technology. Most importantly, however, are our examples of charity, kindness, and service to those around us. As expressed by Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “I am asking that you ‘stand as witnesses’ of the power of the Gospel at all times—and when necessary, use words” (Uchtdorf, 2019).

Relationships

Science: As quoted by Warren, Donaldson, and Lee (2017), Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships—the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together, in the same world at peace” (p. 1).

Relationships involve having a warm, trusting, supportive connection with at least one other person (Lyubomirsky, 2007), and are a fundamental component of well-being. As detailed above (p. 34) and as shown in Figures 2a and 2b, all eight of the theories of and scales for measuring well-being include having relationships. In a study done by Diener and Seligman (2002), 222 college students were assessed for their levels of happiness using multiple scales and surveys such as the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). The happiest students had superb social relationships, and many of them. They displayed behavioral characteristics such as being extroverted and pleasant, and manifested fewer neurotic tendencies. Their higher levels of happiness did not come from exercising more or engaging in other behaviors that have been associated with well-being such as church attendance or going to other “good events” (Abstract). The necessary factor for consistent happiness was having robust social relationships. In their analysis of the well-being of nations, Diener and Seligman (2004) discovered that social

relationships, not economic factors, were consistently a strong predictor of well-being, even across multiple cultures and peoples. One primary source of relationships is the family.

Scripture: The scriptures are replete with admonitions for and guidance toward positive relationships. “Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die...” (D&C 42:45). “And there was a strict command throughout all the churches that there should be no persecutions among them, that there should be an equality among all men; that they should let no pride nor haughtiness disturb their peace; that every man should esteem his neighbor as himself...” (Mosiah 27: 3-4). “Behold, their husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children...” (Jacob 3:7).

Practice: The family is the fundamental unit of the LDS Church, and all of its principles and practices are designed to support the family . One of the most comforting beliefs in LDS theology is the potential for the continuation of family ties beyond the grave.

In addition to the family, the structure of the LDS Church also creates warm and strong relationships between members of each congregation, and between congregations. LDS congregations, called *wards*, are organized geographically, with members attending the congregation nearest where they live. A group of wards is called a *stake*. This organizational structure provides opportunities for additional interactions beyond those found during worship services on Sunday. It is very common to see other ward or stake members at the grocery store, gas station, schools, etc., which creates additional threads of bonding and making it easier to render service to each other . The ward is sometimes referred to as a *ward family*. Indeed, it can become a type of family, being a strong network and support system (Peterson, 1995). This is

powerful because no matter where one moves to or visits, literally anywhere in the world, one can find a ward nearby and within a few days have a circle of friends and a support network.

In reviewing the information on status-building social capital discussed previously (Wuthnow, 2002), wards' and stakes' geographical boundaries usually cut across a broad socioeconomic spectrum, with people from all walks of life worshipping and serving together. Ward and stake leadership positions at all strata are held by people coming from all sections of the socioeconomic spectrum.

Service / Contributing to Society

Science: Altruistic service involves contributing to the welfare of others even if it is inconvenient and offers no material reward (Lyubomirsky, 2007). As with meaning and relationships, service was also discussed in detail previously (p. 44) and is one of the vital components of well-being. In another follow up study done in 1994 from information gathered from the *Americans' Changing Lives* panel survey (n = 2348), volunteer work helped reduce depression amongst the elderly (those over 65) as well as those who were younger (Musick & Wilson, 2003). Being of service to others appeared to build psychological resources such as self-confidence and self-esteem, and social resources such as increased friendships (which relates to the findings above on the importance of relationships) and access to useful information to improve our lives (Musick & Wilson, 2003). Furthermore, Musick and Wilson (2003) found that, for the elderly cohort, volunteering within a religious-setting context such as a church group yielded greater amounts of these psychological and social benefits than did secular volunteering.

Scripture: “And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17)

Practice: The scripture listed above is memorized by almost all youth and adults in the LDS Church, and is modeled through their behavior. Historically, LDS members volunteer up to seven times more service hours to their communities than other Americans (DiSanto, 1970). They are equally generous with their financial donations, not only to the LDS Church but to social causes as well (DiSanto, 1970).

The Relief Society, a women's organization founded by the LDS Church on March 17, 1842, (Relief Society Organization, 1842), is known as the oldest and largest women's organization in the world. Service is its foundation and generosity its byword. Indeed, its motto "charity never faileth" is manifested in the lives of its 7 million members as they serve each other, their communities, and the world at large (Service: The Heart of Relief Society, 1987). This service has included offering medical training to women, building hospitals, establishing adoption services, and engaging in countless local and global relief projects ranging from a Relief Society sister simply bringing a meal to a new mother to delivering countless items to refugee camps in war-torn countries to making almost 6 million masks in six weeks for frontline workers in the 2020 pandemic (Project Protect, 2020; Refugee Outreach, 2016; Service, 1987).

LDS Charities, another service arm of the LDS Church created in 1985, has donated \$2.3 billion in relief funds and countless hours of service to almost 200 countries around the world, irrespective of those countries' religious inclinations (Latter-day Saint Charities, 1985). These activities and attitudes were presaged in the Book of Mormon:

...and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength. And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted; and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely....And now, because of the steadiness of

the church they began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need...And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need. (Alma 1:26–30)

The Cultivation of Well-Being Through Religious Practice

In reviewing these elements of well-being as they are manifested by, through, and within the principles of LDS theology and its practices, we can see the *collaborative approach* (Pargament, 2002, p. 171) to life in which people work together with God as partners, crafting a life of high satisfaction and well-being, especially when faced with a crisis. This differs from a *self-directing approach* (Pargament, 2002, p. 171) where people primarily rely on themselves and the resources they believe God has given them in order to solve problems and live life, or the *deferring approach* (Pargament, 2002, p. 171) where people passively wait for God (or some resources outside of themselves) to solve their problems and ameliorate their life's difficulties.

These approaches were part of what Pargament described as *religious coping styles* (Pargament, 2002, p. 171), which are different ways in which people respond to challenges and crises, and overall ways of approaching life. These three different styles/approaches were linked to different life outcomes. The self-directed style/approach to life manifested in higher self-esteem and a sense of having more control over one's life. Those with a deferring style/approach had lower self-esteem, lower sense of control over life, worse problem-solving skills, and less

tolerance for people who were different than themselves. Understandably, this style is criticized by psychologists and therapists because of its resulting poor life outcomes (Pargament, 2002).

The collaborative style/approach to life involved some “give-and-take” (Pargament, 2002, p. 171) between the individual and God and manifested in greater self-esteem, greater sense of personal control over life, and a lessened sense that life was simply a game of chance. This collaborative style also led to significant decreases in depression when faced with circumstances that were extremely stressful. These findings were replicated by other researchers (Pargament, 2002) and this style is reflected in LDS scripture: “...you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold...you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right...” (D&C 9:7–8).

This collaborative style/ approach also falls into a *positive pattern* (Pargament, 2002, p. 171) of religious coping that includes characteristics of assuming the best in difficult situations, being humble and willing to ask for support and assistance from church leaders and fellow congregants, being willing to give support to others, and to extend forgiveness over hurt feelings.

Clearly, what we believe matters, as it directly impacts our life outcomes. How we choose to blend our beliefs about God with our human resourcefulness will make a noticeable difference in our lives. Thus, through this discussion we have found numerous intersections between the restored Gospel of Christ – “the great plan of happiness” – and the research from positive psychology on well-being. In viewing this, LDS Church members may have confidence that even though their membership and involvement may require effort and is sometimes inconvenient and challenging, that involvement itself can create a reservoir of well-being to be drawn upon in times of difficulty, and can be a source of fulfillment and joy in the present.

Why do we need Positive Psychology if we have “the Church and the Gospel”?

“...if there is anything virtuous, lovely, of good report, or praiseworthy,
we seek after these things.”

Joseph Smith
13th Article of Faith

If the principles of the restored Gospel of Christ and the practices of the LDS Church overlap so significantly with positive psychology research, and those principles and practices have been shown to increase happiness and well-being, why, then, would a member of the LDS Church be motivated to study positive psychology, or to integrate research-based practices for happiness and well-being into their lives? Why not just go to church and let that be sufficient?

The LDS canon covers a subset, but not a complete explication, of positive psychology research. LDS Church members are encouraged through the 13th Article of Faith, referenced above (See Appendix A), to overtly seek after elements of information and value that can enhance our lives. Seeking indicates that one does not already possess that which is sought, that there are additional concepts of well-being and happiness which can be pursued and added to our lives. Additional passages in the Doctrine and Covenants (1845) convey a similar message: “...seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118) and “...study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people...” (D&C 90:15) and “...obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man...” (D&C 93:35).

While there has been a seemingly tug-of-war between science and religion over the centuries (Viney, 2008; Seiler, 2012), the concept of ongoing revelation is a bedrock principle within LDS doctrine, and is combined with the belief that the temporal and spiritual are merged,

with each one influencing and being part of the other (D&C 29:34). These beliefs allow for and overtly encourage the seeking of new discoveries in the scientific world which can improve our lives. Pursuing advances in knowledge combined with the influence of spiritual guidance can be applied to the field of positive psychology. We can then use its principles and practices to better our lives and the lives of those around us.

Enhanced Well-being: Applying Principles and Practices of Positive Psychology

“Yet few of us truly appreciate just how much we can improve our happiness or know precisely how to go about doing it.”

Sonja Lyubomirsky
The How of Happiness

Five additional concepts in positive psychology seem particularly relevant to LDS members seeking to expand and enrich their faith-based happiness practices: resilience, explanatory style, thinking traps, character strengths, and meditation. (Seligman, 2002; Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Bruce, Shatté, & Perlman, 2015). The first three – resilience, explanatory style, and thinking traps are intertwined, with explanatory style and thinking traps (learning to avoid them) helping to build resilience. They have similar characteristics; however, each shall be discussed separately.

Resilience

Resilience is a core component of well-being. Resilience can be thought of as the ability to overcome obstacles, navigate through adversity, bounce back from challenges, and to grow in spite of, or even because of, the hardships we face (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Bruce, Shatté, & Perlman, 2015). It’s the capacity to continue on in the

important aspects of our lives despite painful and distressing circumstances, and to even find meaning and purpose within them (Southwick & Charney, 2018).

People who are resilient have greater energy, reduced anxiety, stress, and depression, enhanced character strengths, richer relationships, and greater success in school and work (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Masten et al., 2009; Bruce, Shatté, & Perlman, 2015; Southwick & Charney, 2018). Importantly, resilience helps us neutralize some the residual effects of negative events that happened in our childhood which were beyond our control (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

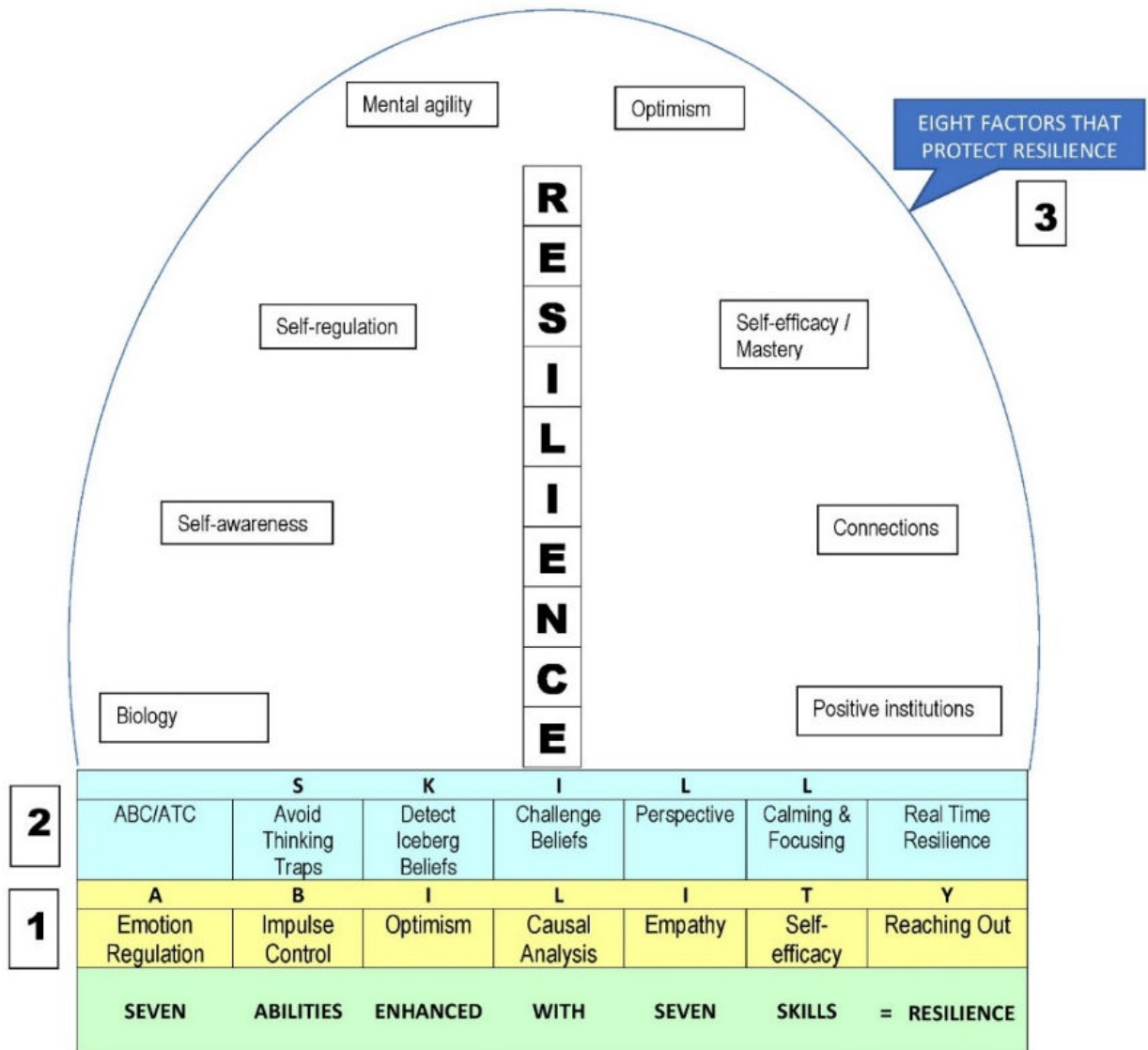
Like an optimistic explanatory style, resilience is a buildable skill, a renewable resource. It can be taught, it can be learned, and, like any other skill, it can grow stronger and more effective with experience and practice (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Bruce, Shatté, & Perlman, 2015; Southwick & Charney, 2018).

Resilience can be pictured as having a foundation rooted in accurate causal analysis, emotion regulation, empathy, impulse control, optimism, reaching out to others, and self-efficacy (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Layered onto this foundation are buildable skills of avoiding thinking traps, detecting and challenging our *iceberg beliefs*, taking a broader perspective on the situation that has beset us, calming our emotions and focusing our attention on the positive, managing the connection between our adversity, our thoughts and our subsequent emotions, and developing a specific skill called Real-Time Resilience, which will be described below (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Masten et al., 2009; Bruce, Shatté, & Perlman, 2015; Southwick & Charney, 2018).

Iceberg beliefs, as the name implies, are those that sit below our conscious awareness yet have a profound influence on our choices and behavior (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). For example, we may hold an iceberg belief that people cannot be trusted, due to experiences with untrustworthiness in the past. That iceberg belief colors our interactions with people in the

present such that we wrongfully impute untrustworthiness into interactions with people who are actually behaving in a trustworthy manner (Haselton, Nettle, & Murray, 2016). The effects of our iceberg beliefs can be damaging to our relationships, and the more we become aware of these beliefs, the more we can navigate around them, and also alter them (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

As we build our resilience, we can also protect it with components such as mental agility, optimism, positive institutions, self-awareness, self-efficacy, self-regulation, taking care of ourselves physically, and warm social connections (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Masten et al., 2009; Bruce, Shatté, & Perlman, 2015; Southwick & Charney, 2018). This foundation, accompanied by a set of buildable skills and a group of protective factors may be diagrammed thusly in Figure 6



Based on the research done by Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatté, *The Resilience Factor*

Created by Robin Litster Johnson for MAPP 15 (2020)

Figure 6. The Resilience Chart. This chart shows the various components that make up and influence resilience.

I shall now focus on one specific and vital resilience skill: Real-time Resilience. This aptly named skill is known as one of the “fast” resilience skills (Reivich & Shatté, 2002) which can be used instantly, in the moment, when intrusive and unproductive thoughts flood our minds. It uses many of the elements found within the skill of avoiding thinking traps, and is especially

potent when negative emotions threaten to overwhelm our ability to cope with life's challenges (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). The purpose of Real-time Resilience is to immediately confront and change the counterproductive thoughts which automatically flit through our minds, so the tide of negative emotions which would normally ensue from such thoughts can be stemmed.

Real-time Resilience utilizes five core strategies for breaking the link between our counterproductive thinking and the negative emotions which stem from those thoughts:

- Evidence
- Reframe
- Plan
- Control
- Strengths

Each of these strategies has a tag line (J. Saltzberg-Levick, personal communication, March 7, 2020, Reivich & Shatté, 2002) or sentence starter (Resilience Skills in a Time of Uncertainty, n.d.) to help kickstart and automate our overt response to any invasive thoughts. The more skilled we become at immediately challenging intrusive, counterproductive and unproductive thoughts, the less often they will appear (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). These strategies and sentence starters can be diagrammed as such in Figure 7:

Strategy:	Sentence Starter:
Evidence	"That's not true because...."
Reframe	"A more helpful way to see this, or a better way to see this is...."
Plan	"If X happens, then I'll do Y...."
Control	"I can't control everything, but one thing I can control is...."
Strengths	"I can use my character strength X to...."

Figure 7. Real-time Resilience Chart. This chart shows the strategies and sentence starters to employ the skill of Real-time Resilience.

Again, how we complete each sentence starter must be accurate, specific, and vivid or it will not be powerful enough to challenge, overcome, and change our counter-productive thoughts and beliefs. Each phrase must be realistic and relevant to the problem at hand, otherwise it will not be believable and will not dispel the unhelpful thoughts and emotions.

Mistakes when learning RTR. Like any skill, we will make mistakes as we develop our competency in being resilient. Here are common mistakes along the road to Real-time Resilience (Reivich & Shatté, 2002):

- Pollyanna optimism: We must use realistic optimism (accuracy) or we won't believe the strategy and the challenge to our thinking will fail.
- Dismissing the "grain of truth" in the negative thought: Some problematic thoughts have a grain of truth in them. Acknowledge it, and look for ways to change it or deal with it in a way that makes our challenge to the thought believable.
- Blame game: We typically either blame ourselves or we blame others when a problem arises. Merely changing who we blame will not be a strong enough deterrent to counter the negative thought.
- Minimizing the problem: Simply minimizing the problem as a way of dismissing it will not work, because inside we know the gravity of the situation. A realistic assessment and acknowledgement of the situation will strengthen the answer we create.

Resilience, and the skill of Real-time Resilience, are foundational to well-being and happiness (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Masten et al., 2009; Bruce, Shatté, & Perlman, 2015; Southwick & Charney, 2018). They intertwine with explanatory style and thinking traps. All of these concepts hinge on how we think. For members of the LDS Church, the scriptures are

replete with exhortations to examine our thinking: “Look unto me in every thought. Doubt not, fear not” (D&C 36:6) and “...if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, ye must perish” (BOM, Mosiah 4:30). Holding onto a pessimistic explanatory style or falling into a thinking trap might be considered a form of emotional, mental, and/or psychological perishing.

Explanatory Style

Explanatory style is a core component of building resilience. The notion of explanatory style was illuminated by research on learned helplessness by Dr. Martin Seligman in the 1960s and further discussed in his book *Learned Optimism* (1990). Explanatory style describes the way in which we talk to ourselves – the explanations we give ourselves – when either good or bad events happen to us. Seligman describes explanatory style as “the word in your heart” and mused that within each of us there resides a predominant “no” or “yes” (1990/2006, p. 16). The “no” whispering within can be thought of as a pessimistic explanatory style, while the gentle yearnings of “yes” could be thought of as an optimistic explanatory style.

Explanatory styles spin on the triple axes of Personalization, Pervasiveness, and Permanence (Seligman, 1990.) These three dimensions also manifest along their own continuum:

Personalization: internal versus external

Pervasiveness: universal versus specific

Permanence: long-term versus temporary

Each dimension and continuum also produce a particular type of thought process. The pessimistic and optimistic explanatory styles can be diagrammed thusly, as shown in figure 8:

	Pessimistic	Optimistic
Personalization	Internal – “I got a bad grade. I’m so stupid.”	External – “I got a bad grade. I didn’t study enough.”
Pervasiveness	Universal – “I always screw up everything.”	Specific – “My report wasn’t as strong as I would have liked but I handled that problem with our client really well.”
Permanence	Long-term – “The rest of my life is ruined.”	Temporary – “Things are challenging right now, but we’re already planning on how to turn things around.”

Figure 8. Chart of Explanatory Styles, along 3 Axes. This chart shows examples of pessimistic and optimistic explanatory styles, along the three axes of personalization, pervasiveness, and permanence.

Holding a pessimistic explanatory style could be thought of as being in the quadruple “P” state:

P⁴ = Personal, Pervasive, Permanent Pessimism

Such pessimism often produces a *maladaptive passivity* in the face of real life problems (Steen, Peterson, Lopez, & Snyder, 2009), whereby people are passive and avoid the very actions that could ameliorate their problems. However, this damaging pessimistic explanatory style is neither solely inbred nor inevitable. An optimistic explanatory style can be learned, if it is not already possessed, as indicated by the title of the book *Learned Optimism* (Seligman, 1990).

Optimism directly and positively impacts our well-being and happiness (Carver, Scheier, Miller, & Fulford, 2009; Seligman, 1990; Steen et al., 2009). Those with optimism enjoy more of the outward measures of success in life such as good grades, winning elections, and fulfillment at work, as well as the ability to persevere and more creatively solve problems. They also enjoy greater health and longevity (Carver et al., 2009; Seligman, 1990; Steen et al., 2009).

In a long-term study from 1985 to 2000 which examined the power of optimism to protect against depression (Giltay, Zitman, & Kromhout, 2006), 464 men were assessed, starting in 1985, every five years regarding their levels of optimism. From 1990 to 2000 these same men were assessed every five years on their levels of depression. Various aspects of their health, such as heart disease, and lifestyle, such as their living arrangements and level of education, were

included in the analysis. The results were notable: only 30% of those who scored high in optimism developed depression compared to 65% of those who scored low in optimism. Even more starkly, when looking at only those with symptoms of severe depression, only 8% of those who scored high in optimism succumbed to this disease compared to the 30% of those low in optimism.

An optimistic explanatory style can be developed by first becoming aware that a pessimistic style exists, and then using a specific process and set of tools to reform it. This process can be summarized by the acronym ABCDE (Seligman, 1990):

Adversity – any event, big or small, that doesn't go as desired

Beliefs – the specific thoughts we say to ourselves when adversity strikes; these thoughts congeal into **beliefs**

Consequences – the negative emotions generated by our thoughts/beliefs, and the actions stemming from those emotions

Disputation – talking back to the thoughts/beliefs which led to the negative emotions and consequent actions. “D” can also stand for Distraction and Distancing, additional techniques to break the grip of our counterproductive beliefs and their consequent unhelpful emotions.

Energization – the energy or improved affect that comes from successfully disputing, distracting, and/or distancing from the unproductive beliefs.

Although an adversity is defined as something negative, it has been observed that even positive events will sometimes generate a pessimistic response (Seligman, 1990; Reivich & Shatté, 2002). For example, when something goes well, pessimists will discount, minimize, and explain away their contributions to the successful event, thereby undermining the pleasure and uplift they might have otherwise derived from that success.

Following the ABCDE model can disrupt the downward psychological spiral generated by a pessimistic explanatory style, leading instead to an upward spiral of taking positive action to remedy the results of the adversity or to put situation into a different, less drastic perspective (Seligman, 1990; Reivich & Shatté, 2002). This process leads directly to another crucial strategy for increasing well-being and happiness: avoiding thinking traps.

Thinking Traps

Thinking traps are another core component of resilience. The concepts underlying thinking traps were originally illuminated by Aaron Beck, the creator of Cognitive Therapy (Beck, 1967) which later became known as Cognitive Behavior Therapy (History of Cognitive Behavior Therapy, n.d.). Although his work focused on depression and its many threads, further research revealed that the same thought processes comprising and feeding depression also undermine resilience (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Reivich, Gillham, Chaplin, & Seligman, 2005). Sometimes thinking traps appear as “ticker tape” thoughts that frequently flit, unbidden, through the front of our brains. Other thinking traps reflect deeply-held beliefs that emerge when using “mental shortcuts” or “rules of thumb” called *heuristics* (Haselton, Nettle, & Murray, 2016; Nickerson, 1998). Mental shortcuts are useful, but they also can filter out valuable data that would have helped us view the world with greater equanimity and make better decisions. These filters are known as cognitive biases (Haselton, Nettle, & Murray, 2016; Nickerson, 1998).

One such cognitive bias is known as *confirmation bias*, which is our tendency to look for – and readily find – evidence that supports our already-established beliefs and opinions, and to disregard, diminish, and disprove any ideas which go against them (Digdon, 2020; Kahneman, 2011; Nickerson, 1998). For pessimists, this can mean disregarding ideas that might disrupt their propensity to be pessimistic, and to even find something wrong with news other people would

consider to be positive (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Seligman, 1990). Although unlikely to be completely overcome, confirmation bias can be reduced through conscious awareness and mental training, if rooted in a desire to improve our thinking (Kahneman, 2011; Nickerson, 1998).

Thinking traps can also be thought of as mental patterns that are counterproductive or unhelpful to our well-being. We can look at any thought, or pattern of thoughts, running through our heads and ask ourselves, “Is this way of thinking helping me or harming me?” (Resilience Skills, n.d.). These thought patterns can be imagined as traps set here and there throughout our mental and emotional landscape in which we can unexpectedly become ensnared. If we possessed a metaphorical pair of infrared glasses to peer into our own brains, minds, and souls, we could detect these thinking traps, defuse them, and defeat them (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

The process and pattern through which thinking traps operate use the acronym ATC: Activating event → Thoughts → Consequences. This is very similar to the mental pathways of a pessimistic explanatory style. An activating event could be a challenge or adversity, mild or severe, and even a positive event. Our “thoughts” are what we say to ourselves after the activating event occurs, such as “I’m such an idiot!” or “I know she hates me!” along with the habitual meaning we layer onto whatever experiences presents themselves. These thoughts set in motion a cascade of emotions, physiological responses, and behaviors, many of which tend to be negative and harmful; hence the moniker “trap” (Seligman, 1990; Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

Some of the more common thinking traps are (Bruce, Shatté, & Perlman, 2015).

- Jumping to Conclusions
- Externalizing
- Tunnel vision
- Mind Reading
- Overgeneralizing
- Magnifying and Minimizing
- Personalizing
- All or nothing thinking
- Catastrophizing

We are usually prone to one or more types of traps, and we can increase self-awareness by observing which thinking traps usually emerge for us, and what they actually sound like (the actual words that come to mind). Some traps travel together, reinforcing each other in their mutual destructiveness (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). However, learning to detect these thinking trap thoughts, defuse them with mental cues, and then defeat them with critical questions is a learned skill that, with practice, can become a strong mental muscle. The more we practice these skills and challenge our thoughts, the more adept we will become (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Bruce, Shatté, & Perlman, 2015). These mental strengths can also help reduce the influence of confirmation bias, when combined with being open to listening to and associating with those of differing opinions (Digdon, 2020; Haidt, 2013; Kahneman, 2011; Nickerson, 1998)

The following chart, Figure 9, shows how to detect some common thinking traps, defuse them with mental cues, and defeat them with critical questions.

DETECT	DEFUSE	DEFEAT
Thinking Trap Example	Mental Cue	Critical Questions
Jumping to Conclusions "I know this is going to turn out badly."	Slow down	What is the evidence for and against my thought?
Mind Reading "I know what he is thinking."	Speak up	Did I express myself? Did I ask for information?
Personalizing "It's all my fault."	Look outward	How did others or circumstances contribute to the activating event?
Externalizing "It's all their fault."	Look inward	How did I contribute to the activating event?
Overgeneralizing "Everything wrong with my kids is because I'm a bad parent."	Look at behavior	Is there a specific behavior that explains the situation?
All or nothing thinking "There is only one solution."	Shades of gray	What nuance am I missing?
Tunnel vision "I can only see what's going wrong."	Look around	Are there other elements I should consider?
Magnifying and Minimizing "The bad is really big, and the good is really small."	A balancing scale	How can I narrow, or broaden, my perspective?
Catastrophizing "Things are going to get worse and worse."	Stop sign	What's the best case scenario? What's the most likely scenario?

Figure 9. Detect, Defuse, Defeat! Chart. This chart shows the pattern and examples of common thinking traps and how to defeat them. Based on research done by Reivich and Shatté (2002).

Our answers to the critical questions must be accurate and based in real-world evidence. The more vivid and specific they are, the more believable they will be, enabling us to better conquer those thoughts and escape from the thinking trap (Seligman, 1990; Reivich & Shatté, 2002). The concept of thinking traps leads directly to the next concept of resilience and the actionable skill of Real-time Resilience.

Character Strengths

As demonstrated above, one of the Real-time Resilience strategies included the use of our character strengths to challenge counterproductive thoughts and overcome adversity. This again demonstrates that the elements of well-being overlap with and reinforce one another.

After the introduction of positive psychology at the APA conference in 1998 (Seligman, 1999), scientists and scholars in positive psychology soon saw the need for a robust counterpart to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (Peterson, 2006; Peterson & Park, 2009; Seligman, 2018). This manual would describe, study, and amplify the character strengths essential to the cultivation of well-being. In 2004, the Character Strengths and Virtues Handbook was authored by Christopher Peterson at the University of Michigan and Martin Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2018).

Over 55 social scientists studied philosophies, religions, and psychological principles throughout the world and across time, looking for attributes valued by humankind – character traits spanning millennia and cultures. They found 24 character strengths – positive qualities and capabilities that are personally fulfilling, do not harm or reduce others, and are esteemed across time and peoples – that fell within six over-arching virtues which also span time and cultures, as shown in Figure 10: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.

Wisdom	Courage	Humanity	Justice	Temperance	Transcendence
Creativity Curiosity Judgment Love of Learning Perspective	Bravery Honesty Perseverance Zest	Kindness Love Social Intelligence	Fairness Leadership Teamwork	Forgiveness Humility Prudence Self-Regulation	Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence Gratitude Hope Humor Spirituality

Figure 10. Character Strengths Chart. This chart shows the six virtues and 24 character strengths found in the Handbook described above.

Character strengths can be categorized by different levels of usage. Character strengths that come most naturally to any given individual and are used across all or most areas of a person's life are known as *Signature Strengths* (Peterson, 2006; Seligman, 2011; Niemiec, 2018; Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). Using signature strengths on a consistent basis can be summed up in the acronym E.E.E. – they are Effortless and easy to use, Essential to the core of who we are, and Energizing to our minds, souls, and bodies. Niemiec and McGrath (2019) used this acronym to emphasize the importance and value of signature strengths.

Phasic strengths are those in the middle of the rank ordering of character strengths, and *lesser strengths* (Niemiec, 2018, 2019), at the bottom of the ordering, are those that may be underdeveloped, unrecognized, or used less often. A lesser strength may sometimes be thought of as a weakness (Niemiec, 2018, 2019), but that is not always the case. As an analogy, a violinist who is right-handed will use her left hand with acuity and dexterity while practicing and performing, even though it is used less often in other areas of her life.

An abundance of research reveals that those who know and use their character strengths experience more fulfilling relationships, positive emotions, energy, and resilience, demonstrate greater engagement in work and activities, and have a greater sense of accomplishment and meaning in life (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Wagner, Gander, Proyer, & Ruch, 2019).

For example, Wagner and colleagues (2019) performed a study that examined the relationship between character strengths and PERMA (Seligman, 2011), the theory of well-being created by Seligman which posits that we need positive emotions, engagement (being involved in something intrinsically interesting), relationships, meaning, and accomplishment for a rich, satisfying life. Wagner et al. used two cross-sectional forms of research for their study: first, a self-report by each participant (n = 5521) and second, a self-report combined with information provided by an acquaintance of the participant (n = 172). Participants completed the VIA Institute Character Strengths Survey (VIA Institute, n.d.) (for Germany) and the Orientations to Happiness questionnaire which captures the elements of PERMA.

The results showed that that all of the strengths were positively related to all of the PERMA elements, and that some of the strengths showed a stronger connection to certain of the elements of well-being. For example, the element of accomplishment seemed to travel well with the strengths of persistence and zest, whereas strengths such as love and kindness were good predictors of warm relationships (Wagner et al., 2019).

The notion of character strengths can be easily grasped by members of the LDS Church, and character strengths can be thought of as gifts from God. Indeed, the D&C explicitly states, "...for there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God. To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby" (D&C 46:11-12). By developing individual strengths, and sharing them with others, the individual and the entire community can benefit.

While the concept of character strengths – developable gifts – can be readily understood by LDS Church members, the depth and breadth of those strengths is often unrealized, taken for granted, or minimized. As Elder Marvin J. Ashton (Ashton, 1987) stated in a General Conference

of the LDS Church, “One of the great tragedies of life...is when a person classifies himself as someone who has no talents or gifts...because of our demeaning self-appraisal, it is a sad day for us and a sad day in the eyes of God.” The research conducted by Niemiec (2018), Peterson and Seligman (2004), and others (Haidt, 2006; Singh, Junnarkar, & Kaur, 2016; Park, Barton, & Pillay, 2017) shows that these 24 global strengths and their over-arching virtues exist to a greater or lesser degree throughout humanity. Ashton (1987) continues that even gifts which are less apparent or publicly esteemed are important for individual and community well-being and should be recognized and developed.

This notion is echoed in the words of Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf (2011) at another General Conference of the LDS Church when he said, “...we spend so much time and energy comparing...our weaknesses to their strengths. [We] create expectations for ourselves that are impossible to meet...we never celebrate our good efforts because they seem to be less than what someone else does.”

The Values-In-Action (VIA) Character Strengths Survey can help us discover our signature, phasic, and lesser strengths which comprise the constellations of our character. We can become familiar with the language of strengths, how to develop them, and how to use them more fully in the various arenas of our lives (The Science of Character, n.d.).

Meditation

Positive psychology researchers have been studying meditation, which has been practiced by humanity for millennia (Wright, 2006; Haidt, 2006; Smalley & Winston, 2010; Ricard, Lutz, & Davidson, 2014; Muscara, 2019; Selva, 2020). All major religions have utilized some form of meditation (Ricard et al., 2014; Selva, 2020). The most common forms now practiced in the West (including the United States) find their roots in Buddhism (Wright, 2006; Haidt, 2006;

Ricard et al., 2014; Selva, 2020), and also Hinduism (Haidt, 2006; Selva, 2020; Muscara, 2019). Although many forms of meditation used in the West have primarily shed their religious underpinnings, meditation was originally part of religious rituals (Haidt, 2006; Ricard et al., 2014; Selva, 2020).

Meditation can be thought of as “a general term covering a wide range of practices that affect your awareness or utilize contemplation in the service of self-discovery” (Smalley & Winston, 2010, pp. xvi). It can also be thought of as “an intentional practice, where you focus inward to increase calmness, concentration, and emotional balance” (Eisler, 2019, par. 5).

There are hundreds of forms of meditation (Newberg & Waldman, 2010; Smalley & Winston, 2010; Ricard et al., 2014) but there appear to be three primary categories of meditation that have become widespread in the West: those involving a focused attention, those involving mindfulness, and those involving a form of compassion (Ricard et al., 2014). Using sports as an analogy (also see Appendix C), there are myriad types of sports, and we can loosely divide them into sports that use balls which are moved directly by the players’ hands, feet, or other body parts; sports that use balls that are moved with another object such as a racquet or stick; and sports that don’t use balls at all; yet they are all considered sports. Thus it is with meditation, with myriad types falling into core categories.

Choosing which type of meditation to use depends on what we want to accomplish, and although there appears to be a broad overlap between meditative practices, each particular form of practice will have its own focus and results (Newberg & Waldman, 2010). All forms of meditation appear to have benefits, with a few caveats (Newberg & Waldman, 2010).

Benefits and Caveats. The benefits of meditation are myriad. Meditation has been studied extensively for decades, with the positive results published in almost countless tomes (Haidt,

2006; Muscara, 2019; Newberg & Waldman, 2010; Smalley & Winston, 2010) , articles, speeches, internet posts, etc., and through almost any form of communication that exists today.

Some of these benefits include:

- Lower stress, anxiety, anger and depression (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998)
- Greater executive control and higher cognitive function (Dahl, Lutz, & Davidson, 2015; Ricard et al., 2014)
- Increased attention (Jha, Krompinger, & Baime, 2007)
- Better memory (Wright, 2006)
- Increased self-awareness (Dahl, Lutz, & Davidson, 2015; Ricard et al., 2014)
- Better physical health, immune system function, and longevity (Wright, 2006)
- Increased empathy and compassion (Dahl et al., 2015; Ricard et al., 2014; Wright, 2006)
- Better interpersonal skills such as tolerance, patience, trust, gratitude (Singh et al., 2016)
- Improved grades and academic performance at school (Waters, L., 2017).

For an example of the results of meditation, Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, (2008) conducted a long-term, randomized study to ascertain if positive emotions brought about by loving-kindness meditation could help build other resources. This is in keeping with the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions explicated earlier (Fredrickson, 2004).

Fredrickson and colleagues (2008) hypothesized that by practicing and becoming proficient in loving-kindness meditation, meditators would experience more frequent daily episodes of positive emotions, which would broaden their mindsets and lead to increased personal resources, building mental and emotional reserves and increasing overall life satisfaction. There were 202 participants, 102 in the test group and 100 in the control group, and

all received baseline assessments on various psychosocial components as well as the perceived resources held by each participants. The test group attended a 7-week loving-kindness meditation (LKM) workshop, with a weekly meditation at the work site and assignments to do meditations five days per week in between on-site sessions. The control was told that they had been put on a waiting list to do the intervention and to go about their lives as they normally would.

Although the level of positive emotions initially dipped down for the meditating group, by the beginning of the third week, Fredrickson and colleagues (2008) reported that “the dose-response relationship between the practice of LKM and the experience of positive emotions tripled over the course of the study” (p. 1052) and the levels remained higher than baseline even two weeks after the study was over. Fredrickson and colleagues further acknowledged that of the 18 resources assessed at baseline, “increases in positive emotions over the course of the study were associated with significant increases in [half of] these resources, which were, in turn, associated with significant increases in life satisfaction” (p. 1055). This is promising affirmation that meditation may directly impact well-being.

Despite this plethora of positive benefits, there are some caveats to meditative practice. Focusing in meditation on a concept that is not valued by the meditator can result in agitation; for example, an atheist meditating about God could have suboptimal results (Newberg & Waldman, 2010).

Opposition to Meditation. Despite this “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1 KJV) regarding the multitudinous benefits of meditation, some LDS Church members are reluctant to meditate. According to Newberg and Waldman (2010), the social unrest in the 1970s influenced many young people to abandon their participation in traditional Western organized religions and to turn instead to Eastern spiritual practices, including various forms of meditation. As a result,

whether fair or not, social unrest, youth rebellion, and meditation became conflated, creating an aura of mistrust toward meditative practices by conservative church members across the country. Meditation became identified with Eastern religions (Newberg & Waldman, 2010) and was avoided by many Christian conservatives, even though Christianity has its own robust scriptural meditation stories.

Meditation in the Church. Isaac meditated in his field, (Genesis 24:63), Joshua meditated on the book of law (Joshua 1:8, KJV), and the Psalmist mentions meditation multiple times (Psalms 1:2, 63:6; 77:12). For LDS Church members, one of the most profound and foundational revelations received by the Prophet Joseph Smith came as a direct result of meditation, “And while we meditated upon these things, the Lord touched the eyes of our understandings and they were opened, and the glory of the Lord shone round about” (D&C 76:19). A later prophet, Joseph F. Smith, also received a magnificent manifestation as the result of pondering and reflecting (D&C 138:1-2, 11), where pondering and reflecting are considered forms of meditation. The people in the BOM were instructed to “...go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand...” (3 Nephi 17:3). A core instruction in the BOM is to ponder, “Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things...that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men... and ponder it in your hearts” (Moroni 10:3).

In sum, these five core principles and practices of positive psychology – explanatory style, thinking traps, resilience, character strengths, and meditation – are all consistent with principles of the restored Gospel and practices of the LDS Church, and if used liberally, have the potential to expand LDS Church members’ well-being and enhance their happiness, as well as the well-being and happiness of the general public.

Limitations

“Half of being smart is knowing what you’re dumb at.”

Mom / Grandmother / Lillie Birdell Gillespie Litster / Birdie
Mother of the Author, Deceased

In laying out the limitations of this paper and research project, I acknowledge that the first chief limitation is myself. I have great passion for the broad domains examined by this endeavor – the restored Gospel of Christ, the modern-day LDS Church, and positive psychology. My exuberance and cognitive biases at times threatened to overpower the balanced perspective needed to maintain academic objectivity and fairness in the search for truth. However, by being conscious of this, and by overtly seeking the guidance and feedback of my Capstone Advisor, I hopefully maintained an appropriate balance, not shying away from studies and commentary which were unfavorable toward religion, while, of course, including those that were favorable.

Another limitation is the notion of finding association versus correlation versus causation in the research. Various concepts between Gospel teachings and positive psychology principles are similar in nature, and certain elements are related to each other – for example, the findings that attending church is positively related to well-being. Further study is needed to discover in what way they are related. Did going to church cause the increase in well-being, or only modestly influence it, or do those two factors simply co-exist? If causation was involved, from which aspects of going to church did the causation emerge? Was it the sociality of being with other church members? The music? The sermons? Being of service? Is it possible that if there were causation, that it was a combination of various factors, not just one? Is it possible that for one person, causation could come from one combination of factors, and for someone else it might be a different combination?

These limits to the establishment of causation could sway some to disregard religion altogether – because it can't be “proven” – even though the starting point for much scientific exploration, including in the field of positive psychology, begins with small threads of relationships and associations. We would miss the benefits of myriad advances in science if we stopped our explorations merely because we initially only saw obscure relationships between various factors. As Fredrickson (2008) beautifully expressed, there is an “embryonic state of evidence” (p. 1047) between some of the silken cords connecting religion, spirituality, well-being, and happiness, and nurturing that embryo may bring about a life yet unimagined.

Future Directions

“We have much more to aspire to than less suffering.
We can also aspire to more PERMA, more well-being, and more happiness.”

Martin Seligman
The Hope Circuit

For a future direction of research, an important rite of passage for many members of the LDS Church is serving as a fulltime missionary. There are currently about 67,000 fulltime missionaries serving in almost 400 areas throughout the world.⁴ Most of them are young adults under the age of 25. Serving as a missionary can help a person develop independence, emotional fortitude, adaptability, leadership, organizational competence, and myriad other life skills.

A mission is extraordinarily challenging on every level – physically, emotionally, mentally, psychologically, and spiritually. Missionaries have the unusual combination of being expected to abide by numerous rules of high personal conduct, and yet have almost complete

⁴ I served a mission in Córdoba, Argentina, March 1978 – August 1979.

autonomy in how they choose to organize and live each day. They are not paid for their service or living expenses; it is completely volunteer. The LDS mission typically lasts from 18 months to two years, and missionaries work “from dawn to dusk” performing various duties, which include giving extensive service in their respective areas. They are typically assigned to several different neighborhoods within their mission, moving every few months to meet, interact with, and serve a variety of communities.

Some missionaries need to leave their missions early for various reasons (Doty et al., 2015), including physical, emotional, or mental health issues. The percentage of missionaries ending their missions early has been increasing (Doty et al., 2015), and for many of those missionaries, leaving their mission early is emotionally devastating (Doty et al., 2015; Adams & Clopton, 1990; Adams, 1995). If there were a way to bolster the missionaries when – or before – they begin to have emotional or mental turmoil, the LDS Church could reduce the number of missionaries ending their missions early and thus reduce those traumatic experiences.

Knowing the empowering impact positive psychology interventions⁵ can have on well-being, including the five described above, a future direction of research and application would be to teach these well-being skills to missionaries, using controls groups, etc., and ascertain whether they improved the emotional and/or mental states of missionaries. If so, this could enhance their well-being, and enable them to complete the full term of their missions. Character strengths assessments and instruction may also bolster the missionary experience, similar to the areas of application suggested above.

⁵ The term “intervention” as used within positive psychology is not to be confused with that term as it is used in other domains, such as drug and alcohol addiction treatment programs.

This research and application could be valuable because there are other groups of primarily young adults offering service, such as the Peace Corps (Work for the World, n.d.), AmeriCorps (AmeriCorps, n.d.), and Habitat for Humanity (Habitat for Humanity, 2020). It would be safe to assume that these young adults face many of the same challenges as do “Mormon missionaries.” The positive psychology interventions and elements of well-being could be used to bolster them and their service, which would benefit communities throughout the country and the world that are served by these groups, for years to come. If it were found that these challenging service opportunities could be fortified and enhanced with the research and practices of positive psychology and well-being, perhaps more youth and young adults would be emboldened with the spirit of volunteerism, giving greater service to their neighborhoods, their nations, and the world.

Conclusion

“Happiness is the object and design of our existence;
and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it....”

Joseph Smith
Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith

In this exegesis on happiness, we have observed that humanity in general has sought happiness for millennia. Happiness has been defined in many ways, with two primary categories emerging – hedonia and eudaimonia. Hedonia is a more temporary form of happiness and typically involves the senses and sensations of pleasure, and micro-moments of positivity as labeled by Fredrickson (2014). Eudaimonia is a longer lasting form of happiness and is often equated with the broader term *well-being*. It involves, amongst other things, a sense of meaning and purpose beyond ourselves, often including some sort of self-sacrifice, or the rendering of

service, or the giving of oneself to attend to others. Both forms of happiness are important and bring richness, depth, and well-roundedness to our lives.

An analogy might be that of a eating a luscious carrot cake with cream cheese icing. If we only had the icing – hedonia – we would miss out on the nourishing density, texture, and richness of the cake. On the other hand, if we had only the cake – eudaimonia – and no icing, there would also be something of material essence – a spark of some sort – missing in that culinary experience. So it is with life. A combination of sources of happiness and well-being, momentary as well as long-lasting, are necessary ingredients for creating a life that is worthwhile and worth living (Peterson, 2006).

Extensive research in the field of positive psychology, including the many areas of research relating to it before the field as such was named, has helped identify numerous roads to happiness, with a variety of vehicles by which we can travel those roads. There are threads of commonality among them, such as the elements listed in Figures 2a and 2b, including having meaning in life, warm relationships, competence, autonomy, and positive emotions.

Religion in general includes many of these elements, and may function as both road and vehicle along the journey to happiness and well-being. This notion of the inherent value of religion for one's spiritual self has been proposed for millennia, and now, aided by modern technologies of research, design, and analysis, the value of religion for one's overall psychological, emotional, and mental well-being can now be tested and validated.

Like the anthropologists who revised their theories and conclusions about the intelligence of primitive cultures in generations past, (Franz Boas, 2019; Liss, Du Bois, Boas, 1998), many of the anti-religionists still alive who had previously brushed aside religion and spirituality as things of naught are now conceding that perhaps there is something of value to be found within them

(de Botton, 2012; Haidt, 2013; Seligman, 2018). This value may account, in part, for religion's tenacious hold on the human psyche and soul (Newberg & Waldman, 2010; Newberg, 2019; Pargament et al., in press). It is possible the answer to the question "why God won't go away" (Newberg, D'Aquili, & Rause, 2002; Newberg, 2019) is now being answered by science itself.

Within the broad world of religion, we narrowed our focus to one religion in particular, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We examined the broad overlap between the research performed within the world of positive psychology and the practices springing from that research, and the principles of the restored Gospel of Christ and the practices of the LDS Church. This broad overlap may explain the high life satisfaction and happiness within LDS enclaves – along with high stress and worry, sometimes associated with meaning in life – that was found in the big data analysis (See Appendix B) of American communities (Eichstaedt, 2017).

The big data analysis combined the American Communities Project and the World Well-being Project. The American Communities Project (ACP) uses data from 15 different types of counties and communities across the United States to examine various influences helping to change the country on a local level (Nicholson et al., 2020). The World Well Project (WWBP) (Authentic Happiness, n.d.) is a group of social scientists and statisticians who use language found in social media, such as tweets, to understand and predict various measures of well-being in a variety of contexts. By overlaying the techniques of WWBP over the communities found in the ACP, Eichstaedt was able to review various states of well-being – or the lack thereof – found within these communities. Visuals of these results collected from 2011 to 2014 are found in Appendix B.

This paper has proposed that by applying the strategies crafted from the research in positive psychology, such as developing an optimistic explanatory style, using Real-time

Resilience to neutralize thinking traps, understanding and more fully utilizing character strengths, and meditating on a regular basis, members of the LDS Church could retain and increase their life satisfaction and happiness, all while maintaining a high sense of purpose. In addition, they might reduce the stress and worry erroneously and unnecessarily emanating from that sense of purpose and meaning. Furthermore, they could use these strategies to possibly reduce stress and worry in general, and to better manage life's other inevitable vicissitudes.

Joseph Smith finished his quote on happiness, above, thusly: "...and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God" (Smith, 1938, p. 255). It may be possible to find association, connection, correlation, and even causation (Krause, 2018) between the attributes of virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, and holiness and the elements of well-being and happiness that have been illuminated by the academicians of positive psychology and the field's proponents. This affirms Diener's proposition (2011) that "Scientific inquiry is not a replacement for religious understanding or philosophical insights, but...add[s] helpful new dimensions to these age-old sources of wisdom" (p. 245).

Appendix A – LDS Terminology, in Alphabetical Order

Articles of Faith: The Articles of Faith are a list of 13 core beliefs held within LDS doctrine, as enumerated by Joseph Smith (PGP):

1. We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.
2. We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.
3. We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.
4. We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.
5. We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.
6. We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.
7. We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth.
8. We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.
9. We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.
10. We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.
11. We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.
12. We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.
13. We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul – We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

Bible: According to the 8th Article of Faith, members of the LDS Church believe that the Bible is the word of God “as far as it is translated correctly.” The LDS Church officially uses and reveres the King James Version because it considers that translation to be more doctrinally correct in its presentation of the Gospel of Christ (The Holy Bible, 1611).

Book of Mormon: The Book of Mormon (BOM) is considered to be an ancient religious record, comparable to the Bible, of a people who lived in the Americas from about 600 BCE to about 421 CE. A series of prophet-historians wrote the record of this civilization on thin gold plates, with the primary author being named Mormon. Through a number of events of a spiritual nature, Joseph Smith obtained the plates and, as it is believed by members of the LDS Church, translated them “by the gift and power of God” into English, and called the document the Book of Mormon. This is where the nickname “Mormons” came from. Members of the LDS Church consider the existence of the Book of Mormon to be evidence that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, similar to prophets in the Bible. As the Bible is known as the Old and New Testaments of

Christ, the Book of Mormon is considered “another testament of Christ.” Thus far, the Book of Mormon has been translated into 112 languages (Book of Mormon, 1830).

Doctrine and Covenants: The Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) is part of LDS canon, and is a collection of what members of the LDS Church consider to be divine revelations and inspired declarations. Most of them were received through Joseph Smith, with the remaining coming through some of the prophets who succeeded him. Although most were received primarily for establishing and organizing the LDS Church, many of them were directed toward individuals’ well-being and are considered by LDS Church members to still be relevant today (Doctrine and Covenants, 1845).

General Conference: These are semiannual worldwide gatherings where LDS Church members receive guidance and encouragement from LDS Church leaders, based on the teachings of Christ. General Conferences have been held in one way or another since 1830. General Conference is held in Salt Lake City, UT, and is broadcast over the internet in 80 languages, and is later translated into 94 languages (General Conference, n.d.) and disseminated through Church magazines and the internet.

Pearl of Great Price: The Pearl of Great Price (PGP) is part of LDS canon and includes writings considered by members of the LDS Church to be of divine origin. It contains five major sections: writings of Moses, writings of Abraham, writings of the Apostle Matthew, portions of Joseph Smith’s history, the Articles of Faith, which is an enumeration of core beliefs (Pearl of Great Price, 1851).

Primary: The Primary is the organization established in 1878 for teaching the restored Gospel to children ages three to twelve. Children ages 18 months to three years attend Nursery, an arm of the Primary, where they also learn principles of the Gospel. The activities in Primary include singing and lessons where the children actively participate, with even three-year-olds being asked to give short sermons or prayers (Primary, 1878).

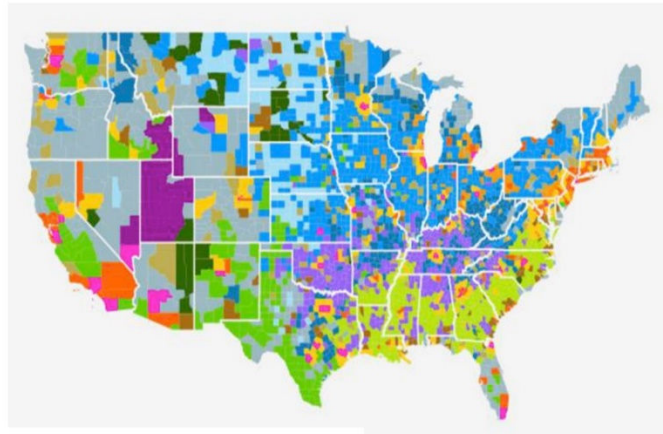
Relief Society: The Relief Society, established March 17, 1842, is the largest and oldest women’s service and educational organization in the world. Its motto is “charity never faileth.” Its purpose is to help women develop faith, strengthen individuals, families, and homes, and to be of service both locally and globally. The “ministering, leadership, and teaching opportunities” afforded to women through the Relief Society “increase their self-reliance, enlarge their talents, expand their knowledge, strengthen families, and reach out to those in need” (Relief Society Organization, 1842; Relief Society, 2020).

Young Women’s and Young Men’s programs: The youth of the LDS Church have had organizations for their behalf as far back informally as 1843. The current organizations were made official in 1869 and 1875 respectively. Their general purpose is to help youth build Godly character, be of service to their families and humankind, and make and keep covenants with God (Children and Youth, n.d.; Young Men, 2020; Young Women, 2020).

Additional information on the above listed items may be found on the Church website at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org> (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830).

Appendix B – Big Data Charts: American Communities Project and World Well-being Project.
See page 101.

American Communities Project



(Source: Chinni, americancommunities.org)

Life Satisfaction



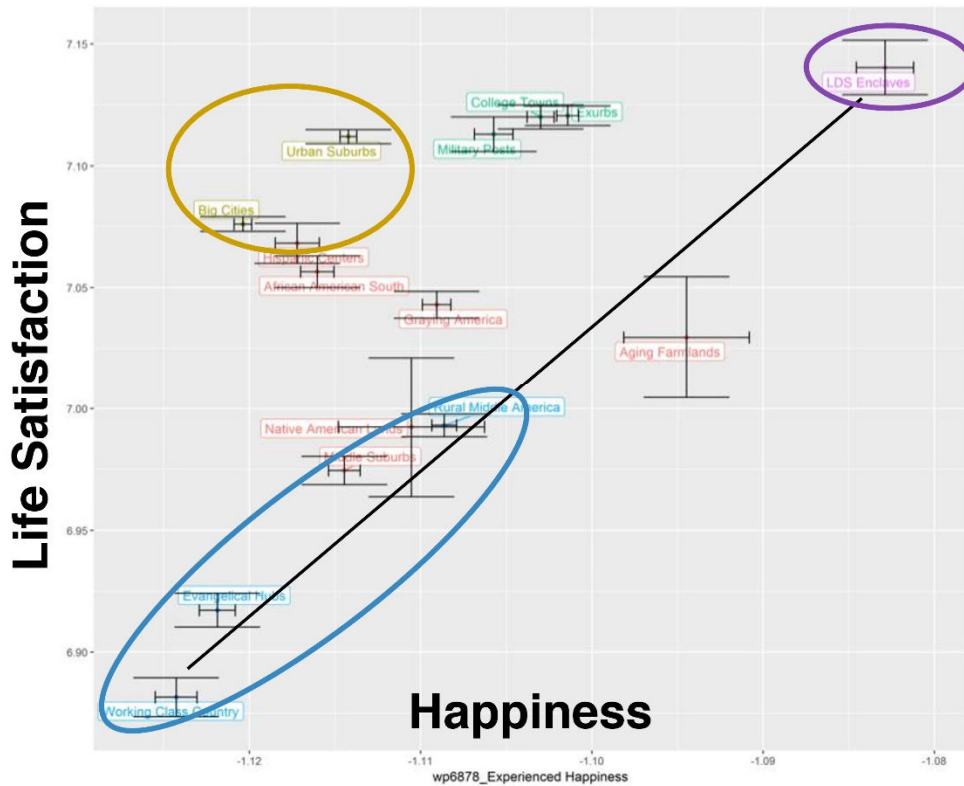
LDS Enclaves	0.63
Exurbs	0.51
College Towns	0.51
Urban Suburbs	0.46
Military Posts	0.40
Big Cities	0.22
Hispanic Centers	0.19
African American South	0.12
Graying America	0.03
Aging Farmlands	-0.05
Rural Middle America	-0.27
Middle Suburbs	-0.38
Native American Lands	-0.38
Evangelical Hubs	-0.74
Working Class Country	-0.95



Happiness

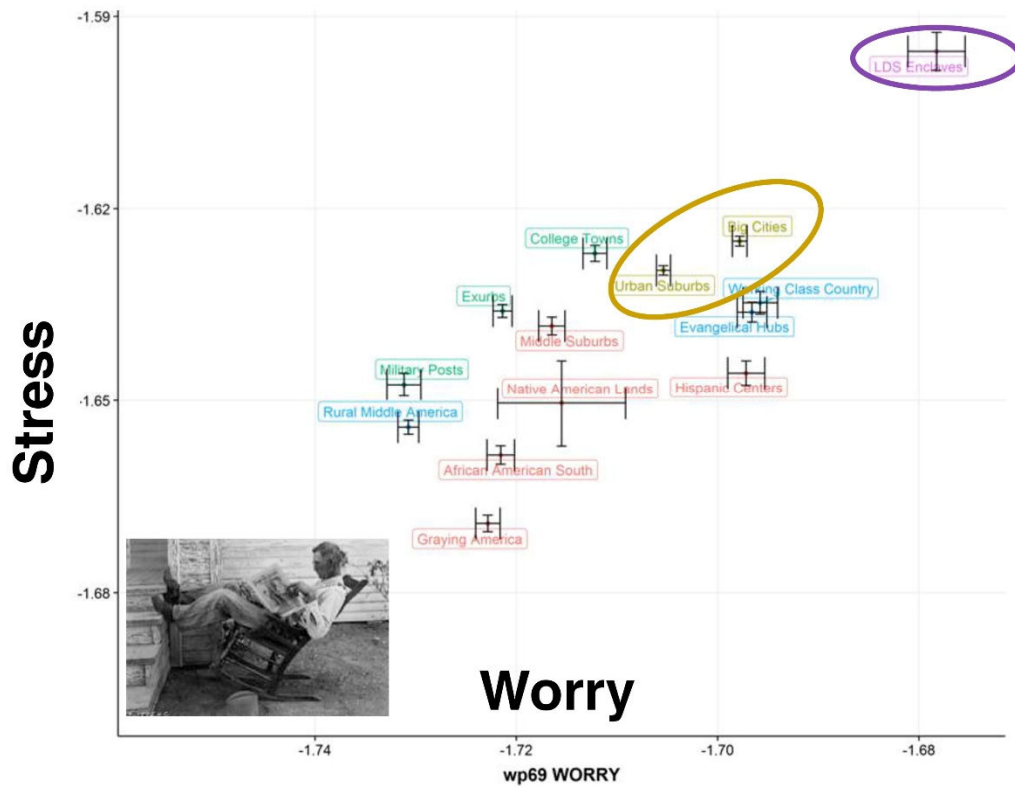


LDS Enclaves	1.47
Aging Farmlands	0.86
Exurbs	0.50
College Towns	0.42
Military Posts	0.22
Rural Middle America	0.13
Graying America	0.09
Native American Lands	-0.06
Urban Suburbs	-0.17
Middle Suburbs	-0.18
African American South	-0.26
Hispanic Centers	-0.33
Big Cities	-0.50
Evangelical Hubs	-0.57
Working Class Country	-0.70



Stress

LDS Enclaves	1.50
Big Cities	0.55
College Towns	0.49
Urban Suburbs	0.40
Working Class Country	0.24
Exurbs	0.20
Evangelical Hubs	0.19
Middle Suburbs	0.12
Hispanic Centers	-0.11
Military Posts	-0.17
Native American Lands	-0.27
Rural Middle America	-0.39
African American South	-0.53
Graying America	-0.87
Aging Farmlands	-1.59



Appendix C – Meditation on Meditation

by Robin Litster Johnson

As described in the section on meditation, page 92, I have historically been rather suspicious of meditation. My entire life, I had only thought of meditation as being one “thing” – like a single loaf of white bread sitting by itself on a shelf in the pantry. In July 2017, I attended the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA) World Congress in Montreal. It offered a pre-conference Workshop on Loving-Kindness Meditation led by Barbara Fredrickson and Sharon Salzberg. I had no idea who these women were, but I figured I could always be more loving and kind, and so I signed up for the Workshop. It wasn’t until about half-way through their presentation that it began to dawn on me that Loving-Kindness Meditation wasn’t necessarily about being more loving and kind – although it can certainly help in those areas – but that it was a “thing.” So, I added another metaphorical loaf of bread to my shelf, and then I had two loaves of bread in my proverbial pantry: a white loaf of “meditation in general” and a brown loaf of “Loving-Kindness Meditation.”

Upon entering the MAPP program, and especially after the presentation on meditation by Michael Baime (2011, 2019) during the fall semester, I felt like I had stumbled into Porto’s Bakery (Porto's Bakery, n.d.), with hundreds of luscious and diverse loaves of bread and bakery items of every sort lining the shelves and overflowing the baskets filling the room. I have discovered that there are literally hundreds of different types of meditations lasting from a few seconds to hours or days, and covering every purpose and intent and desire conceivable. I am now a devotee of meditation and consider it part of a well-rounded spiritual and physical practice.

Appendix D – Six Additional Elements of Well-being not Explicated Above

Element	Science	Scripture	Practice
Accomplishment Competence Mastery	Accomplishment is the ability to advance in the world (Ryff, 1989), manage the responsibilities of daily life (Keyes, 2002), and is something that people will pursue for its own sake (Seligman, 2018).	“...that every man may improve upon his talent, that every man may gain other talents, yea, even an hundred fold...Every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God” (D&C 82: 18-19).	All LDS children are given opportunities to develop skills and competence – giving a prayer or talk in church, for example, or helping with a service project. This continues throughout life. The LDS Church is a lay church, primarily run by volunteers in almost all positions, including most leadership positions. Everyone, even the disabled, can serve and develop their skills and abilities. Volunteers rotate service positions, giving individuals, over the course of a lifetime, many opportunities to grow in various areas. For example, the same person can hold service positions as far-ranging as being the public relations coordinator for multiple congregations, to only teaching three 18-month-old children in one congregation. (Organizations and Callings, n.d.).
Engagement	Being involved in activities that are intrinsically interesting and absorbing (Seligman, 2011).	“Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness, for the power is in them...” (D&C 58:27-28).	The LDS Church recently introduced a new personal development program for children and youth where they can, with the help of parents and leaders, discover interests, set goals, and expand their experiences so they can have richer, fuller lives and be of greater service to their families and others. This program is specifically designed to help children and youth find areas for engagement, both for now and in the future. Similar encouragements are directed at adults. (Children and Youth, n.d.).
Health / Vitality	Health includes the having the resources and ability to eat well, move regularly, and experience rejuvenating sleep (McQuaid & Kern, 2017).	“And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings...shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones; and shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures; And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint” (D&C 89: 18-20).	One of the most distinguishing features of being LDS is the lifestyle of abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea, and illegal drugs. This protocol is known colloquially as <i>the Word of Wisdom</i> . The health benefits that come from following it are significant (Haymond, 2013), as are the mental, emotional, and spiritual benefits as outlined in the scripture itself.

High Satisfaction with Life	Satisfaction with life is the degree to which we individually feel our life is going well (Diener, 2000).	“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10, KJV).	Although the term <i>satisfaction with life</i> does not appear in LDS canon, there are almost 40 references to <i>abundant life</i> and <i>abundance</i> , which could be thought of as a close approximation.
Positive Emotions	Positive emotions include joy, gratitude, curiosity, interest, amusement, awe, pride, inspiration, serenity, and love (Fredrickson, 2009).	“Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25).	While Fredrickson’s list of 10 positive emotions is not exhaustive, it includes those that are most common within the human experience (Fredrickson, 2009). Teachings on each of these, sometimes using vernacular which is similar if not identical, can be found within LDS canon, sermons from General Conference, hymns, and other methods to increase learning and application. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d.).
Optimism	Optimism can be thought of as having hope in the present and future (Seligman, 1990).	“Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world...(Ether 12:4).	Every LDS canon and conference abound with exclamations of and exhortations toward optimism – that life is good, that this is a good world, despite its challenges and conflicts, and that we can make it better, both individually and collectively. See General Conference which includes sermons going back to 1971. (General Conference, n.d.).

Appendix E – Eve

Pearl of Great Price, Moses 5:10 – 12

And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God. And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient. And Adam and Eve blessed the name of God, and they made all things known unto their sons and their daughters.

Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 2:15 – 25

And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter. Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other. And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God. And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies, wherefore he said: Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil. And after Adam and Eve had shared of the forbidden fruit they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth. And they have brought forth children; yea, even the family of all the earth. And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

The Wisdom and Intelligence of Eve

Detailed article by James T. Summerhays, (Summerhays, 2010) found at <https://latterdaysaintmag.com/article-1-414/>

Appendix F – The “Why”

I originally entered the MAPP program intending on doing research on the connections between music and youth well-being, as I have been extensively involved with music my entire life, and have worked with and been concerned about youth in one capacity or another my entire adult life. However, I noticed that on almost every page of the assigned MAPP readings, both the books and the articles, I would be writing in the margins about how what I was reading connected with elements of my faith’s principles and practices. My mind continually went to these connections. *Continually.*

Then, in class we had a presentation on Capstones and one of the examples was a paper on Catholicism. My mental wheels started turning: if someone did a Capstone on Catholicism, maybe it would be ok to do one on my faith tradition. So, after much deliberation with my Capstone team – the “Dolphin Tank” consisting of Henry, Judy, and Jan – and family members, and within myself, I decided I would shift gears and do my Capstone on the overlap between my faith tradition and the research and practices of positive psychology and well-being. In listening to James and Leona talk about passion and the role it plays in choosing a Capstone, and the Capstone team’s comments on passion, I believe this was a good choice for me.

It is my perception that many members of the LDS community are metaphorically sitting in front of a banquet table laden with a feast, and they’re nibbling on carrot sticks. To me, it seems that many don’t fully grasp the bounty that exists within the principles of the Gospel and the practices of the Church. By learning more about positive psychology and how it overlaps with Gospel teachings, and by applying additional principles and practices of well-being, I believe LDS Church members could be happier, and might more fully appreciate and utilize the amazing bounty they have set right before them. Hopefully this Capstone has lifted the lids on

those metaphorical chafing dishes filling the banquet tables of life, allowing LDS members and others to see, smell, and taste the exquisite cuisine of well-being and happiness which has been placed before them, and which is theirs for the taking.

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