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*Love the Life You Live*

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P R E F A C E

*O*n a sunny day in Seattle, one of those pristine days when every Pacific Northwesterner forgives the rain for falling so much, the two of us were sitting around a table enjoying a leisurely lunch when an idea struck us like a ray of sunshine. The idea for this book was born.

Since we're both psychologists, we first got to know each other because we were focusing on the same area of psychology—mainly the building of healthy relationships. We've written books about the same subjects and repeatedly have found ourselves making the same points about the same issues.

And then we ended up on the same speaking team—leading weekend seminars about healthy relationships and healthy lives. Our wives became close friends, and our relationship as couples grew. We worked to maximize the times we had to talk about crucial issues.

That day in Seattle we suddenly recognized we had come to the same powerful place in our thinking. We both knew that relationships of every kind have virtually no chance in our culture until individuals within those relationships get healthy themselves first. For years we had said, separately and collectively, that relationships can only be as healthy as the least healthy person in them . . . and that individual wholeness is the backbone of a healthy relationship. In fact, that precise message runs through every counseling session, every seminar, and every book we have ever been a part of. So we both knew it made no sense to keep trying to help men and women build good relationships until we had first helped them discover peace and contentment at the center of their *individual* lives.

A single truth brought us together as authors: *Personal health, wholeness, and maturity are at the heart of every relationship that flourishes.* We realized that both of us were receiving similar letters, lots of them, from sincere people with the same key questions. After recounting their story, somewhere in their message they would ask, “You talk a lot about getting healthy and whole, but how do you do this? What are the tools?”

So that day in Seattle we began to talk like two people who were *convinced* we were on the edge of having the answer to the most critical question of our times. We could not shut up. Each of us was scribbling notes on napkins as we resonated with each other’s thinking. It was at that luncheon that we decided to get more intentional about helping people answer these questions. As we talked excitedly, we became progressively more aware of our wholehearted agreement about what emotional and spiritual health is all about. We became, and remain, so convinced that emotional health is attainable in *every* life. That day we agreed—for the first time in either of our lives—to write a book with someone other than our wives, to partner in this deeply meaningful task of trying to shed light on this crucial subject.

This book is the result of many months of common labor on our parts. We have literally written this book from coast to coast. In the corner of a hotel lobby, set on the sands of Santa Monica Beach in California, we first began to structure our thoughts while discussing concepts and drawing diagrams on tablets of paper. We met again at a lodge in the foothills of Colorado Springs, where we refined our thoughts over the course of a couple of days. Another important session occurred months later when our travels brought us together on the deck of a high-rise in Miami Beach, Florida, overlooking Biscayne Bay. That’s where we began to read aloud and critique each other’s writing.

Sometimes we have agonized on the phone for hours in our

search for just the right words, just the right way to represent what we see as the clear path to health and wholeness. We have encouraged each other during difficult times, argued with each other now and then, laughed at our foibles, and all the time centered our attention on you, the reader. We deeply want you to love the life you live. Why? Because you will experience a transformation that will lift up not only yourself, but others, who will see your courage. And because of you, a fresh breeze of authenticity and optimism will encircle their life. You will, in fact, create a little heaven on earth . . . and few human experiences can compare to the sweetness of this. As Luciano de Cresenzo has said so poetically, “We are, each of us, angels with only one wing. And we can only fly embracing each other.”

With every sentence we wrote, we genuinely thought of you. May your reading of our words be as satisfying and life changing as our own journeys to health and wholeness.

LES PARROTT  
*Seattle, Washington*

NEIL CLARK WARREN  
*Pasadena, California*



## IMPROVING YOU, YOUR LIFE, AND YOUR RELATIONSHIPS— FOREVER

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*Life is my university, and I hope to graduate  
from it with some distinction.*

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

*A*t a renowned museum in Florence, Italy, you will find four partially finished sculptures. The famed sculptor Michelangelo had intended for each of them to be used on the tomb of Pope Julius. But midway through the project, he decided not to use them and ceased his work. Today anyone traveling to Florence can see the results—a hand protrudes here, a torso of a man there, a leg, a part of a head. None of them are finished.

If you stand in this great hall, looking at these fragmentary figures, you will sense the turmoil, the struggle embodied in these stones. It's as though the figures are crying to break free from their blocks of marble to become what they were intended to be.

Michelangelo called these figures “Captives.” Study them for a time, and they are certain to stir up within you a deep longing to be completed yourself. Somehow these figures bring more consciously into your awareness the ache in your own soul to be free from anything that is holding you down and preventing the realization of your full potential. The incomplete figures eerily remind you of your

*own* incompleteness. We know—both of us have stood there in that spot and quietly wondered if we were fully alive.

All of us, as humans, share a universal longing to be complete, to enjoy the fulfillment of realizing our God-given destiny.\* But like Michelangelo’s captive statues, we are often frozen in our efforts to experience who we are really meant to be. We never learn the secrets to chipping away at what holds us back. We never discover the parts of ourselves that are still in captivity. The result? We suffocate our calling and remain imprisoned in the jail cell of unfinished work. We are incomplete—never truly *loving* the life we live.

**Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.**

*William Jennings Bryan*

### WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT YOU

You may be single or married, young or old. You may have suffered unthinkable abuse or lived a charmed life. You may have a Ph.D. or be a high-school dropout. Whatever your baggage or background, we know at least one thing about you. Each moment of every day you are either moving away from or toward the person God designed you to be. And as a result, your inner self is either hemmed in and stuck, or it is quietly becoming a work of art. You are either maximizing your moments or allowing them to slip by without notice.

No matter our age, stage, faith, or career, all of us are searching for inner contentment—the kind that comes from being whole and complete. All of us want to love the life we live. This is exactly why we have filled this book with time-tested tools for seizing every moment of every day. We want you to learn the secrets of maximizing a simple moment in time by releasing the positive potential it contains for you and everyone around you. Once you begin to learn the simple skills we are about to teach you, the moments of your day will become consistently more meaningful, more exciting, until you realize you are growing. Thriving. Flour-

\*See note at the beginning of “Sources” on page 253.



ishing. You are becoming healthier, more complete. You are unlocking parts of yourself you didn't know you had. You are freeing yourself and your relationships to be fully alive.

Since you are reading this book, we know that something within you has been stirred to move more intentionally toward health and wholeness. And we are going to do everything we can to help you experience it deeply and consistently. We are convinced that it is only when you achieve a deep level of emotional and spiritual health that you can find enduring inner peace and long-lasting joy. If you want to feel good, deep down in your soul, you've got to get yourself solidly healthy.

### HEALTHY TO THE CORE

When you achieve the level of health and wholeness we've been describing, you will begin to feel unusually good about yourself. Not the kind of good that is self-centered, but the kind of good that makes a positive, generous, caring human being out of you. Not only will you *feel* good, but you will *be* good. You'll catch yourself expressing all kinds of natural and free-flowing appreciation and love for others. And your newly found health will be so contagious that your whole community of friends and family—even strangers you encounter—will find their lives moving toward personal joy and self-giving love.

Goodness comes out of a solidly healthy inner place—and then it pours out of you in all directions. In the process of discovering new levels of personal effectiveness and fulfillment, you will inspire others to find those same new levels for themselves. As you learn to live serenely, above the grit of the daily grind, you will become committed to making this possible for every person you know. As you develop the skill of making wise decisions that define your life for the better, you will discover an inner passion to help others enjoy the same powerful and life-changing process. As you shake off your hurry-sickness and live in the now, being fully

**A man too busy to take care of his health is like a mechanic too busy to take care of his tools.**

*Spanish proverb*

present for yourself and those around you, you will see the same thing beginning to happen for your dearest friends and family members. In short, as you love the life you live, this whole wonderful phenomenon will spread across the struggling society of eager human beings who make up your personal world.

### IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK

If this is what you want for your life—a positive transformation of you and your relationships—here's the good news: *You can have it!* This is exactly the kind of life you can live. At the risk of sounding like two slaphappy psychologists who are seemingly out of touch with the arduous work traditionally required for authentic wholeness, living the life you long for may be less complicated than you think.

We believe you can reach your most cherished goals for loving this life by following a relatively simple path.

An easy path? Not always. But simple nonetheless.

**There's a period  
of life when we  
swallow a  
knowledge of  
ourselves and it  
becomes either  
good or sour  
inside.**

*Pearl Bailey*

How can two veteran psychologists who have spent their professional lives in the hallowed halls of academia and in the clinical offices of mental-health centers make such a bold and seemingly naive claim? Because we believe wholeheartedly that all the answers to life's most challenging questions are available in ancient, time-tested principles—and our confidence in these truths is bolstered by new and powerful research in the social sciences. A contemporary generation of researchers with a fresh perspective in the sciences has shifted psychology's primary analyses of misery to an understanding of wellness. Psychology used to think it was critical to focus on—and then eliminate—negative emotions. Now we know there is a better way.

### YOU AND YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WILL NEVER BE THE SAME

The new research reveals that you can't be happy simply because you *aren't* encumbered by depression, stress, or anxiety. No—you

can't be happy without being *healthy*. And there's a lot more to health than not being sick. Emotional health is more than the absence of dysfunctional emotions. Emotional health is at the center of a life you can love living.

You'll never be content in your career, at least not for long, if you're not emotionally fit. You can't enjoy being single until you like being you. You can't have a winning marriage if you are psychologically stuck. You can't be a good parent until you understand—and appreciate—who you are. You can't be well-adjusted if you're constantly comparing yourself to others or equating what you do with who you are. And you can't look into the face of death until you optimize your spiritual health.

It is nearly impossible to exaggerate the profound impact getting healthy and whole has on every aspect of your life. So it is certainly no exaggeration to say you will never, ever love the life you live until you become profoundly new and reborn emotionally, mentally, and spiritually at your very core.

The professional community knows more today about how to live a fulfilled life, no matter what your circumstances, than ever before. That's why we felt compelled to write this book. As psychologists specializing in relationships, we have seen more than 5,000 people in therapy. We have spoken to more than 300,000 people in seminars and appeared on several thousand radio and television talk shows. And we've written more than a dozen books—all in an effort to help people improve their lives and relationships. We are passionate about helping you do this too. But rather than give you tips and techniques (for improving communication, understanding gender differences, and all the rest), we've learned that until you get yourself healthy, the tips and techniques are superficial. They eventually fall flat. Why? Because your relationships can only be as healthy as the least healthy person in them. For this very reason, we believe the most important goal you can ever accomplish is getting yourself healthy.

**Not life, but  
good life, is  
to be chiefly  
valued.**

*Socrates*

“Your life is like a coin,” said writer Lillian Dickenson. “You can spend it any way you like, but you can spend it only once.” The question is, how are you going to spend your capital? It is a question we have explored personally and thoroughly while writing this book, and because you are reading it, we know you want to make the very best investment you can. So in the next chapter, you will discover our plan for helping you become healthy and whole.

## *Optimizing Your Spirit*

*We must not allow the clock and the calendar to blind us to the fact  
that each moment of life is a miracle and mystery.*

H. G. WELLS

Optimizing your own spirit, we're convinced, is vital to becoming a supremely healthy person. Why? Our research indicates that you cannot maximize your emotional health without maximizing your spiritual life, because your soul is your most important connection to a caring and loving God—a God who loves you as if you were the only person in the world to love.

Your soul—or your “spirit,” in other words—is the seat of your significance. If you neglect this crucial area, you will never truly enjoy abiding worth. And you are sure to miss out on the full experience of ultimate love if you neglect the vitality of a soulful connection with your Creator.

In the pages that follow, we want to help you cultivate and develop your spirit. First we'll define what your spirit really is and where it dwells. Then we'll talk about how your soul is connected with God, our Creator—and the difference between being simply “spiritual” and truly “religious.” We'll show how scientific research is backing up what we of faith have known all along—that a growing, personal relationship with God is the most important step you can take to infuse your entire existence with meaning and satisfaction.

### **WHERE YOUR SPIRIT DWELLS**

Since the words *soul*, *spirit*, *spiritual life*, and other derivations are thrown around willy-nilly in our society, let us be clear about our

context. Your *spirit* is internal—dwelling deep inside you. You can't see or quantify it. Perhaps that's why so many of us struggle with our spirit.

But perhaps the following explanation will help. Your spirit grows *invisibly* out of an *invisible* part of you that is central to your essence. Your *being* is virtually synonymous with your *spirit*. From this place all the questions that are most profound and vital emerge:

- Who am I—*really*—in the deepest parts of myself?
- What makes up the core of who I am, after all the externals are stripped away?
- Who is in charge of this world and the universe, and am I connected to this Supreme Being?
- What happens when I die?
- What is the purpose of my life?
- How am I related to all these people around me?

How often have you asked these questions of yourself—if ever? If you are not usually given to introspection and philosophizing and you do not already have a meaningful faith at your core, all of this may seem strange and foreign to you. As a matter of fact, it's not easy for any of us to get comfortable with spiritual pursuits. Our culture seems intent on distracting us from such issues. We are consistently told by the media and other sources that what matters in life is the tangible, visual things—what kind of car you drive, the size of the house you live in, the stylishness of your wardrobe, and so on. Since most American families have a television on seven hours a day, it's no wonder we don't focus much on something as ephemeral as our *spirit*.

But here's the crucial point: Your soul begins to be optimized when you focus on *spiritual matters*—when you acknowledge that there is far more to life than material things. The spirit within you becomes awakened and alive when you recognize that the mystery of life far transcends that which you can touch and see and taste. That there is, indeed, a longing within each of us to know our Cre-

ator more intimately. To know why we were created and where we are going, not only in life, but after we die. Until such issues are resolved within, you will never truly *know* your profound significance, understand the longing in your spirit, or have the lasting, personal relationship with God that brings calm and peace in today's tumultuous world.

What's more, instead of merely sitting back and waiting for God to zap you with spiritual change, your growth will gain momentum if you actively and positively participate. So we challenge you to look deep within yourself and explore that "subterranean" world where your most essential thoughts, feelings, and longings reside, while not losing or ignoring your connection to God, either.

## **YOUR SPIRIT AND A SPIRITUAL GOD**

The first prerequisite for a healthy soul is an organizing principle—a framework or context in which to understand this aspect of yourself. The Bible posits that the foundation upon which you craft your life is an all-knowing, all-powerful, never-changing God who has created all things and wishes to relate personally with every person on earth. The first words of Genesis establish the central figure in the unfolding drama: *In the beginning God created . . .*

Participating in the world of the spirit and believing that there is a spiritual God are huge leaps for many people. But the fact is that denying there is any world of the spirit, given all the available research, may require an even greater leap of faith. Some researchers are convinced that a person's spirit flourishes when the individual accesses in a positive way the spiritual world and *especially* when he or she encounters the Spirit of God. These investigators have come to believe that the human spirit is engineered to be at its best when we develop a constructive and intense faith in a spiritual reality and a personal and caring God.

Dr. Herbert Benson, professor at Harvard Medical School and the president and founder of the Mind/Body Medical Institute, has written two influential books on the power and biology of belief.

Working in the midst of a scientific community that tends to be skeptical about anything religious and spiritual, Benson freely admits his own belief in God: “My reasoning and personal experience lead me to believe that there is a God. And yes, a thoughtful design must have been at work in the universe in which such definite patterns emerge, in which incredible coincidences produced our world, and in which humans are wired to bear a physiologically healing faith.”

Benson frequently refers to the “belief-inspired healing in many of my patients.” He has carefully studied why people with a particular type of faith recover faster and stay well longer. He has concluded that these phenomena are not mere chance or happenstance. Summarizing nearly thirty years of intensive research, Benson says:

I am astonished that my scientific studies have so conclusively shown that our bodies are wired to believe, that our bodies are nourished and healed by prayer and other exercises of belief. To me, this capability does not seem to be a fluke; our design does not seem haphazard. In the same way that physicists have found their scientific journeys inexorably leading to a conclusion of “deliberate supernatural design,” my scientific studies have again and again returned to the potency of faith, so ingrained in the body we cannot find a time in history when man and woman did not worship gods, pray, and entertain fervent beliefs.

Moreover, Benson is being joined by a growing number of scientists, physicians, and researchers who acknowledge the interconnection between physiology and spirituality.

### **SCIENCE INVESTIGATES . . .**

For many decades the scientific community stayed far away from anything smacking of religion or spirituality. But during the last twenty years, this has changed. Now one of the hottest topics in physical- and mental-health research involves the consequences of spiritual belief.



This research involves questions like these: If a spiritually inclined person regularly engages in spiritual practices (prayer, meditation, reflection, and so on), does this change anything about his life? Does it make him a healthier person—physically and emotionally?

More than three hundred carefully designed and executed research studies indicate that spiritually actualized people live longer, experience less stress, require less medication, and develop significantly fewer emotional and physical maladies. Further, some thirty-five careful reviews of empirical research studies have systematically concluded that the healthiness of your spirit results in significant contributions to your mental, emotional, and physical health.

One study was conducted by Dr. Warren Berland, a veteran psychological researcher in New York City, who became fascinated by the astonishing survival of thirty-three men and women who had been diagnosed with cancer and given less than a 20 percent chance of surviving five years. Twenty-eight of the thirty-three had already lived longer than five years, some as many as fifteen years, and the other five who had been given a more recent diagnosis were still living, though none of their physicians had expected them to be. All thirty-three of them were moving vigorously into the future.

Berland wanted to know why these patients were still alive—and going strong—when their prognosis had been so bleak. So he decided to ask the patients themselves why *they* thought their lives had defied all expectations. The reason given by most patients: God. From their point of view, God was far more responsible for their survival than conventional or alternative medical treatments. Mind you, these men and women were not selected because of any religious orientation, but when they focused their attention on spiritual matters, their physical lives overcame the expected consequences of their cancer.

Numerous other studies have demonstrated the link between spirituality and health, but let us highlight just a few:

- A Duke University study of 577 men and women hospitalized for physical conditions demonstrated that depression was signifi-

- cantly lower and quality of life higher for those who used positive coping strategies (e.g., having faith in God and praying).
- In another study from Duke University, postoperative patients who engaged in spiritual practices spent an average of eleven days in the hospital compared with nonreligious patients who spent an average of twenty-five days.
  - A 1995 study at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center found that one of the best predictors of survival for 232 heart-surgery patients was the degree to which the patients reported drawing strength and comfort from religious faith.
  - Dr. David Larson, a research psychiatrist at the National Institute for Healthcare Research, surveyed thirty years of studies about blood pressure. His findings showed that churchgoers have lower blood pressure than nonchurchgoers, even when adjusted to account for smoking and other risk factors.
  - A careful review of four major epidemiological studies (involving 126,000 participants) concluded that “those frequently attending religious services had approximately 29 percent fewer deaths from all causes (over a specified time period) when compared to those who were not religiously active.”
  - A 1996 review of several studies indicated that spirituality is associated with less alcohol and drug abuse, lower suicide rates, less criminal behavior, and higher marital satisfaction.

“Nobody knows what really happens in human beings when they pray or when you pray for them in terms of the physiological mechanisms involved,” says Duke’s Dr. Mitchell Krucoff. “But it’s not uncommon to be clueless about mechanisms.” The article, “Can Prayer Really Heal?” goes on to say:

In studies at several medical centers, prayer and faith have been shown to speed recovery from depression, alcoholism, hip surgery, drug addiction, stroke, rheumatoid arthritis,

heart attacks and bypass surgery. . . . Some scientists speculate that prayer may foster a state of peace and calm that could lead to beneficial changes in the cardiovascular and immune system. . . . “I decided that not using prayer on behalf of my patients was the equivalent of withholding a needed medication or surgical procedure,” says Dr. Larry Dossey, a former internist who is the author of *Healing Words* and *Prayer Is Good Medicine*. “I prayed for my patients daily.”

The point is clear: *prayer works*. And research is showing that prayer, much like exercise and diet, has a connection with better health. It leads to benefits such as decreased anxiety and an enhanced sense of well-being. But is it just prayer in general that will bring long-term results in *all* areas of health? Or does the prayer have to be focused on something or someone other than yourself? Here’s what we’ve concluded from our studies.

## OUR CONCLUSIONS

Between us, we have been clinical psychologists for more than fifty years. Several thousand men and women have shared their most intimate struggles and secrets with us. We have explored the human experience from virtually every angle and searched intensively for a clearer understanding of how people develop their spiritual lives—and what the consequences are when they succeed. As a result, we have come to several conclusions.

But before we share these with you, we want to acknowledge that you may be reading this book from a different religious, cultural, or career perspective. You may hold a set of core conclusions about these matters that varies a little or a lot from ours. We deeply respect your total freedom to maintain your beliefs. We share our conclusions with you so that you will know exactly where we stand as you read this book, and so that you can examine these conclusions to determine if they have any value for you.

- Every person has a set of personal qualities that comprise their *spirit*, and individuals become known for this essential aspect of their identity. Their spirit may be self-centered, angry, defensive, and boring, or it may be generous, joyful, kind, and gentle.
- The degree to which a person optimizes his soul is the degree to which he will succeed in life. If his spirit is well-cultivated—if he becomes secure, unselfish, winsome, patient, kind, and generous—he will likely be successful in his relationships, career, and other endeavors. He will be more positive about his future, and less threatened about difficult circumstances and about death.
- A great spirit is almost always the consequence of learning how to nurture and nourish one's spiritual life. The entry path to the world of the spiritual is through relaxed but disciplined prayer and meditation.
- The essence of a healthy spiritual life is a personal relationship with a loving, positive, affirming God. To the degree that a person feels unconditionally loved by this God, deeply and fully forgiven for personal blunders, his spirit is likely to flourish.
- The specific character of the God in whom a person has faith will largely determine the quality and growth of his own spirit. The two of us come from a Christian perspective, and we believe that the God portrayed in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son is the one and only true God. And it is only through knowing him intimately that a person can most effectively develop a spirit characterized by generosity, timeless vision, unselfishness, and optimism.

### **MORE POWER, MORE VIBRANCY?**

When you optimize your spirit, do you have more power? What do you think? Is the link between vibrant spirituality and physical and emotional health mere coincidence, happenstance, chance? Or are there, in fact, specific rules that govern the impact of spiritual practice on healthfulness?

We believe that when you grow your spirit, you gain access to an astounding source of power. Moreover, we suspect that learning to operate within the spiritual realm makes available spiritual influence, or “leverage,” far more extensive than anything that exists within the material world. The Bible notes that “the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

In the midst of our thinking and writing on these issues, we experienced a real-life test case. Les and his wife, Leslie, just had a new baby, Jackson Leslie Parrott. Because their first child, John, had such a perilous birth process (born at twenty-eight weeks, weighing only one pound and requiring a three-month hospital stay), there was considerable concern about Jack’s birth.

Indeed, Leslie had a difficult pregnancy, and in the third trimester, Jack’s growth slowed precipitously. So did his apparent movement in Leslie’s womb. The doctors tried to wait as long as possible for the birth, reasoning that the longer Jack could stay in the womb, the stronger his lungs would become and the sooner he could go home.

Meanwhile, I (Neil) was in almost daily conversation with either Les or Leslie. I had a growing concern about Leslie, especially in relation to the stress of holding on “just a few more days” before giving birth. Every medical precaution was taken to protect her health, but there was no secret about her toxemia, breathing difficulties, and potential blood-pressure problems.

On the night before the doctors decided to induce labor, I had a long telephone conversation with both Les and Leslie, who were at the hospital. With all the news of Jack’s slow growth and lack of movement, I hung up the phone full of emotion. My wife, Marylyn, and I prayed passionately for a miracle—for the baby to be born healthy and for Leslie to endure the process with no long-term complications.

Scores, maybe hundreds, of other friends and family members of the Parrotts were praying as well. When the news came the next morning that Jack had been born perfectly healthy, capable of

breathing on his own and able to be taken home in two or three days, and that Leslie would have no long-term complications, my wife and I excitedly expressed our appreciation to God. We were convinced the highly successful birth and the passionate prayers were intimately related. This did not at all seem to be mere happenstance. To me, it was “the most meaningful miracle” I had experienced in a decade.

But are we kidding ourselves? Would Jack have been born just as healthy if we had never bothered to pray? Could it be that the telephone conversation, the encouraging and supportive words, did whatever good was necessary? Was it just a matter of psychosomatics—positive thoughts that manifest themselves in physical ways? Or is there spiritual power that works quite independently of psychological contact—power that is triggered when men and women pray to God?

We don’t have to rely on intuition or blind faith to answer the question, “Does prayer work?” At least two carefully designed research studies provide compelling evidence. One of them, conducted by R. B. Byrd, involved two groups of patients recovering from acute myocardial infarction. A team of people was enlisted to pray for one group, while no one in the control group was prayed for. Neither patients nor doctors knew who was being prayed for and who wasn’t.

The results were clear: Patients in the prayed-for group fared significantly better than the other patients on a number of health-related outcome categories. They required 7 percent fewer antibiotics at discharge, had 6 percent less pulmonary edema, 6 percent less congestive heart failure, and 5 percent less cardiopulmonary arrest. The intercessory prayer, objectively studied, had stunning positive effects.

Was this a fluke? Another group of researchers wanted to find out, so they attempted to replicate Byrd’s findings. They studied intercessory prayer with 990 patients. Utilizing careful experimental controls, they again found that the prayed-for group in the coronary care unit had significantly better outcomes.

These findings have incredible significance. Scores of prior studies have demonstrated positive effects from prayer, but now on the basis of these intercessory-prayer studies, we catch a glimpse of the *independent* power of prayer. These are not results that could have been “psychologically transmitted”; positive results showed up even when the *persons who were praying* and the ones who were *prayed for* were totally unaware of each other.

This provides evidence of a spiritual world, a totally different reality that operates with consistency—with well-developed rules and massive power potential. It’s clear that persons who have optimized spirits can access spiritual power on behalf of themselves and others. This greatly increases the importance of developing, or nurturing, an optimized spirit.

### **NURTURING YOUR SPIRIT**

In order to optimize your spirit and to participate fully in the powerful ways of the spiritual world, you must develop three distinctive qualities (we’ve discussed them earlier in the book, but here they are—all in one place):

1. First, you must come to a deep and confident appreciation of your own profound significance as a human being.
2. Then you need to be unswervingly authentic—congruent and whole—living your life with unified internal harmony.
3. Finally, you need to understand and practice self-giving love.

When you have fully developed these three aspects of basic psychological health, you are in a position of access to spiritual power.

Still, most of us have not attained anything like perfect scores on the dimensions of significance, authenticity, and self-giving love. Thus, our spirits languish. We are too often straining to defend ourselves, promote ourselves, and save ourselves. And frequently, we work against ourselves because we are not experiencing inner har-

mony. Finally, we often sense that we are passive recipients of life, unable to steer our course, simply accepting our lot in life.

So how do we move forward and effectively grow our spirits? From our perspective, the growth of our spirits will depend on what we believe is true about the major issues underlying our existence *as well as* what we spend our time and energy focusing on within ourselves. This is where we encounter both religion and spirituality.

Religious practices are separate from spiritual pursuits, but the two are intricately linked. Spiritual practices usually involve prayer, meditation, singing, and generally focusing at the deepest levels on our search for significance, our pursuit of wholeness, and our expression of gratitude.

But you cannot achieve psychological health until you get yourself synchronized with beliefs that promote health in a powerful way. This is what “true” religion is all about—beliefs that harmonize with principles that consistently contribute to the attainment of psychological significance, wholeness, and freedom. You need to be religiously healthy in order to attain psychological health.

What do we mean by this? For instance, the Judeo-Christian religion centers on a powerful, always-involved God. And the specific personal message of this God is that he created us for relationship with him. He grants us intrinsic worth, ultimate significance, and assures us that his love is unconditional, for all time, and reaches past all boundaries. And the Bible makes it clear that this attribution of worth will never be withdrawn. When fully accepted and integrated, this religious principle is fundamental to attaining a psychologically healthy life. It has been proven to change millions of lives across the centuries!

Similarly, this same God calls us to become the persons he has uniquely created us to be—persons with particular talents and quirky personalities who know, at their core, that they are profoundly significant because they belong to God. When we respond to this challenge, we are being *religiously responsive* to our cognitive beliefs.

Correct thinking in this *religious* area leads to psychological



growth and an eventual optimization of our deepest, most sacred self—our spirit.

### **ARE YOU SPIRITUAL . . . OR RELIGIOUS?**

During the last twenty years, it has become fashionable for people to say, “I’m a spiritual person, but I’m not very religious.” This usually suggests that a person subscribes to no formal religious beliefs, has no church affiliation, but does have an active interest in the big issues of life. They may also pray, meditate, or “visualize” in their own idiosyncratic ways.

As psychologists, it strikes us as highly unlikely that spirituality unguided by *correct* religious principles will lead to the consistent growth of a person’s spirit. After all, the power of spirituality must be positioned and directed by correct beliefs about those matters that are essential for the development of psychological health. Otherwise there is no real lasting change in the person’s spirit. It is only when people relate to the Creator of the universe—instead of focusing solely on their “inner self”—that life change can occur. Otherwise our self-consumption blocks any hope of experiencing profound significance from a Creator who knows us and loves us.

A major study by a team of prominent researchers that was published in 2002 revealed what, to them, was an unexpected finding. The subgroup from their sample that was both highly spiritual *and* highly religious turned out to be the healthiest of all groups. The researchers noted:

They attended services, prayed, meditated, read the Bible, and had more daily spiritual experiences than the “spiritual only” group. They were less distressed and more trusting than the “religion only” group. They experienced substantial benefits from their balanced religious orientation.

Our own clinical experience, as well as our understanding of countless research studies, has shown that maximizing your

spirit will depend on both the nature of your religious beliefs (i.e., who you believe controls the universe) and the vibrancy of your spiritual expression. We believe this crucial balance of what you believe and how you practice and express it is what your spirit really needs to grow.

## GOOD NEWS FOR CHURCHGOERS

A stunning body of empirical research indicates that people who consistently attend religious services experience incredible physical and emotional health benefits.

We found this a bit surprising—not just because the list of benefits is so broad and varied, but because we had not believed that simply attending religious services frequently would necessarily lead to any profound inner growth, any expansion of your spirit. We thought that the adequacy and accuracy of your personal beliefs and the vitality of your spiritual practices would determine the level of your emotional and physical health benefits. But something else is going on here.

When the National Institute of Healthcare Research explored the relationship between religious and spiritual experience on health, the result was the 1998 publication *Scientific Research on Spirituality and Health: A Consensus Report*. It reviewed a large group of studies showing that frequent religious service attendance, *all by itself*, had broad-range effects on physical and emotional health. These included significantly lower rates of coronary disease, emphysema, cirrhosis, and suicide; lower blood pressure; lower rates of myocardial infarction; and reduced levels of pain in cancer.

If indeed frequent attendance at religious services is singly related to these many health benefits, how do we explain such a dramatic phenomenon?

We speculate that every-week attendees may, over time, assimilate a set of beliefs that directly relates to the three fundamental factors of profound significance, unswerving authenticity, and self-giving love. As we grow more in our knowledge of who God is

and how he interacts with humankind, we may also experience a gradually increasing set of positive feelings. For example, as we believe more strongly in our intrinsic value and worth, as people created by God and loved by God, we may more confidently seek to develop our spiritual life. And as we do, our spirit grows, and the benefits of this growth are the very benefits the researchers have uncovered: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

We become confident of our worth, are more secure in who we are, and consistently strive for a purposeful life. Our spirits are unfettered. We are ready to soar!



*Throughout this book we endeavor to give credit as much as possible wherever our writing has been informed or inspired by someone else's writing. We also hope to tell readers who are interested how they can track down our references or get more information on a topic that interests them. This requires source notes. A majority of readers, however, find little numbers in the text distracting. It interrupts their reading. So for those who care, we provide information on our sources in this section.*

#### **Chapter One—Improving You, Your Life, and Your Relationships—Forever**

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p. 6 (A contemporary generation) Scholarly articles pertaining to "well-being," "happiness," and "life satisfaction" have mushroomed from a mere 150 articles at the beginning of the 1980s to thousands today. No longer is the science of psychology only speaking about suffering. Joy has entered the lexicon of serious scholars.

#### **Chapter Two—How to Get Healthy: A Deep and Simple Plan**

p. 9 (The Bible says) The book of Psalms is filled with these life-affirming principles.

p. 12 ("What will it profit") Mark 8:36, NKJV

#### **SECRET #1: PROFOUND SIGNIFICANCE**

##### **Introduction to Profound Significance**

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p. 22 (Ultimately, we find) M. Argyle, "Causes and Correlates of Happiness," in *Well Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, ed. Daniel Kahneman, Norbert Schwarz, and Edward Diener (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003).

p. 22 ("Everything was meaningless") Ecclesiastes 2:11

p. 24 (However good) A. M. Isen, A. S. Rosenzweig, and M. J. Young, "The Influence of Positive Affect on Clinical Problem Solving," *Medical Decision Making* 11 (1991): 221–227.

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##### **Chapter Four—Tuning In to Your Self-Talk**

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pp. 38–39 (The impact of self-talk) Two seminal works that thoroughly document these studies

can be found in *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy* (New York: Stuart, 1962) by Albert Ellis and *Cognitive Therapy of Depression: A Treatment Manual* (New York: Guilford, 1979) by A. T. Beck, A. J. Rush, B. F. Shaw, and G. Emery. In addition, Albert Bandura's article, "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change," *Psychological Review* 84: 191–215, greatly strengthened the foundation for this thinking.

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p. 46 (And according to) Shad Helmstetter, *What to Say When You Talk to Yourself* (New York: Fine Communications, 1997).

p. 49 ("All the days") See Psalm 139:16

### Chapter Five—Moving Past Your Past

p. 60 (It was not) E. F. Loftus and G. R. Loftus, "On the Permanence of Stored Information in the Human Brain," *American Psychologist* 35 (1980): 409–420.

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p. 60 (After retellings) H. L. Roediger III, M. A. Wheeler, and S. Rajaram, "Remembering, Knowing, and Reconstructing the Past," in *The Psychology of Learning and Motivation: Advances in Research and Theory*, vol. 30, ed. D. L. Medin (Orlando, Fla.: Academic Press, 1993).

p. 61 (Siblings who can't) J. M. Berger, "Whose Life Is It, Anyway?" *Internal Medicine News* 35 (2002): 3.

p. 64 (At the University of Kansas) Raymond L. Higgins, Rita J. Stucky, and C. R. Snyder, *Excuses: Masquerades in Search of Grace* (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1983). See also M. L. Snyder et al., "Avoidance of the Handicapped: An Attributional Ambiguity Analysis," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37 (1979): 2297–2306.

pp. 68–69 (Consider the following) James W. Pennebaker, *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions* (New York: Guildford Press, 1997).

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### A Few Closing Thoughts on Profound Significance

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### SECRET #2: UNSWERVING AUTHENTICITY

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### Chapter Six—Discovering Your Blind Spots

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### **A Few Closing Thoughts on Unswerving Authenticity**

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- p. 142 (his unfailing love) See Psalm 90:14

### **SECRET #3: SELF-GIVING LOVE**

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### Appendix A—Optimizing Your Spirit

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**Appendix B—Charting Your Destiny**

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- p. 234 (As you become) See Psalm 139:1
- pp. 234–235 (Take Benjamin Franklin) “Benjamin Franklin: An Enlightened American,” July 25, 2000. Located at <<http://www.careerplanit.com/resource/article.asp?subid=1&artid=3>>.
- p. 236 (Howard Figler) Howard Figler, “How to Decide What You Want to Do,” July 2000. Located at <<http://www.careerplanit.com/resource/article.asp?subid=1&artod=3>>.
- p. 236 (“Do not store”) Matthew 6:19-21
- p. 236 (“Examine who”) Russ Jones, “Take Charge of Your Destiny by Drawing Up a Career Plan,” *National Business Employment Weekly*, July 2000. Located at <<http://careerjournal.com>>.
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- p. 237 (“live and move”) Acts 17:28
- pp. 240–241 (Katharine Graham was) Katharine Graham, *Personal History* (New York: Knopf, 1997).
- pp. 241–242 (Renowned author) Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak* (Hoboken, N.J.: Jossey-Bass, 2000).
- p. 246 (“In the coming world”) Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 251.
- p. 247 (For instance) See appendix 1 of *Date? . . . or Soul Mate?* or go to the Web site, <<http://www.eharmony.com>>, for a complete presentation of the twenty-nine dimensions.
- p. 252 (And it all) This material is discussed more fully in my (Neil’s) chapter “Dream a Dream” from the book *Learning to Live with the Love of Your Life . . . and Loving It!* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1995).