

The Emerging Paradigm of  
Existential Positive Psychology  
& Abundant Life Human Flourishing

©Paul T. P. Wong, Dean Davey, Claude-Helene Mayer, & Richard G. Cowden

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# OVERVIEW

- 1. Introduction: The need for a paradigm shift in positive psychology.**
- 2. A paradigm shift towards existential positive psychology (EPP or PP2.0).**
- 3. Biblical support for abundant life and EPP.**
- 4. The spiritual processes for abundant life and sustainable flourishing.**

# I. INTRODUCTION

- Do you remember the darkest days of your life, when you found yourself at the bottom of an abyss, the whole world seems to have abandoned you, and God did not seem to answer your urgent cry for help?
- During those days, could you find any help from the positive psychology launched by Martin Seligman and embraced by the Christian community?
- Have you looked at the daily devastation and sounds and sights of human miseries in Gaza and Ukraine?
- Have you thought about all the existential threats to humanity (e.g., nuclear war, ecological crises; Wong et al., 2022)?
- It is unbelievable that human beings are trying to destroy each other as well as themselves with all their greed and pursuit of happiness and power.

## The Most Promising Approach to Human Suffering



◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

*“Man has to cope with the problem of suffering. The Oriental wants to get rid of suffering by casting it off. Western man tries to suppress suffering with drugs. But suffering has to be overcome, and the only way to overcome it is to endure it.”*

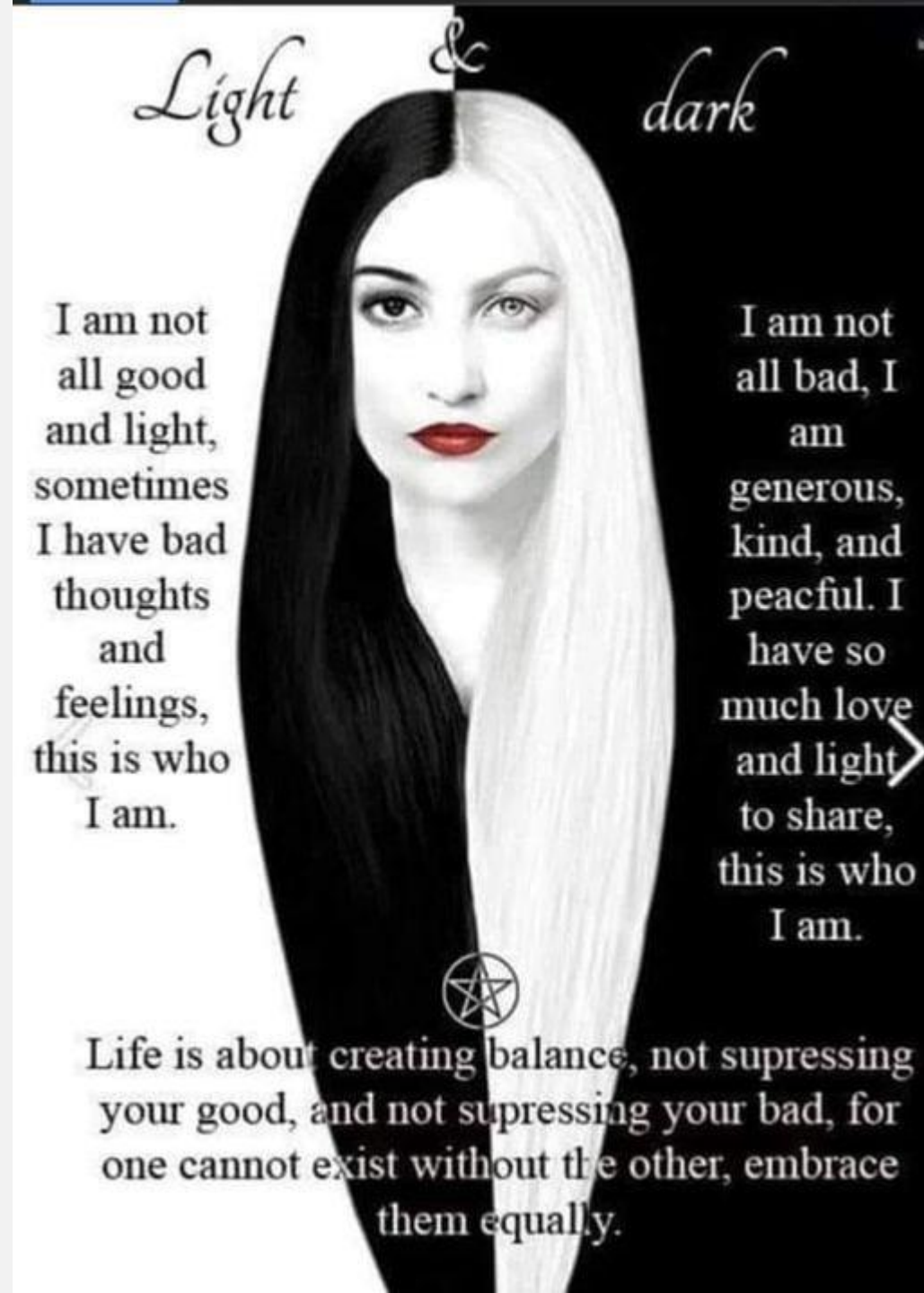
– C. G. Jung, Letters, Vol. 1

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Jung's wisdom of how to cope with suffering remains very relevant and helpful today. More and more psychologists have come to the same conclusion.

Realistically, we can neither end suffering nor ignore it because suffering is always an inescapable part of life. Both science and everyday experience have confirmed that the most promising approach is to confront and endure suffering so that we can transcend or transform it into something meaningful and beneficial to the individual and society.

A rose by any other name remains a rose. Whether you call this new paradigm **existential positive psychology** (EPP) or regenerative positive psychology, the basic idea is to re-orient oneself towards the necessity of overcoming suffering as the foundation for **existential wellbeing** (EWB).

- To present one's best self only serves to perpetuate the positive illusion and prevent one from discovering one's true self which always involves both the light and dark sides.



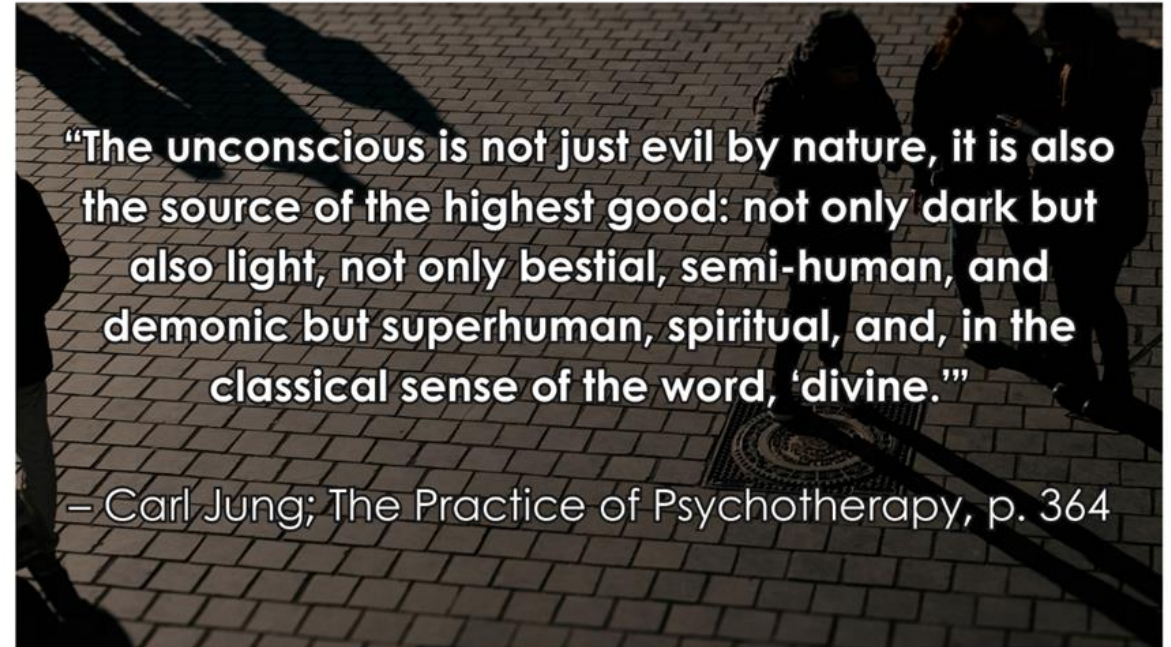
I am not  
all good  
and light,  
sometimes  
I have bad  
thoughts  
and  
feelings,  
this is who  
I am.

I am not  
all bad, I  
am  
generous,  
kind, and  
peaceful. I  
have so  
much love  
and light  
to share,  
this is who  
I am.

Life is about creating balance, not suppressing  
your good, and not suppressing your bad, for  
one cannot exist without the other, embrace  
them equally.

- Clearly, we need to reorient towards the universal problems of human suffering – the missing link in research on wellbeing and flourishing on the whole life with all its complexities, depths, and heights.
- We need an integrative, interdisciplinary model of wellbeing involving science, philosophy, and religion.
- Existentialism, multiculturalism and the positive psychology of suffering are the three cornerstones of EPP (Wong, 2023a, in press).
- A theory of global wellbeing needs to be based on the indigenous conceptions of happiness in different cultures.
- Existential positive psychology (EPP or PP2.0) represents such an emerging paradigm (Wong, 2021).

## Two Sides of The Shadow



The unconscious region of our mind (both personal and collective unconsciousness), contains all of our repressed and suppressed impulses. Therefore, our Shadow is both dark and bright, both demonic and divine.

To become whole and healthy, we need to face both the bright and dark sides of our Shadow. That is how we can benefit from all the creative insights, wisdoms, and spiritual energies and at the same time transform the monster in us into a friendly beast.

## SELF-INTRODUCTION

- Both Paul and Dean have been Pastors and have served the church for almost all their lives.
- There has always been a divide between the Christian community and the psychology community. Many Christians still believe that psychology is from the devil; and many Christian counsellors mainly use the Bible as their authority.
- On the other hand, most psychologists are unbelievers who dismiss Biblical teaching as unscientific and supernatural.
- This abundant life conference is important in narrowing this gap. We hope that our presentation will demonstrate that both the spirituality edge for all people and the benefits of deep insights from psychologists can help Christians in coping with their own personal and interpersonal issues.

## 2. A PARADIGM SHIFT TOWARDS EXISTENTIAL POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY (EPP OR PP2.0)

- Contrast between PPI.0 and PP2.0

## Two Different Models of Human Flourishing



**Seligman's PERMA model:**

1. Positive emotion – Hedonic and eudaimonic happiness.
2. Engagement – Do things we truly enjoy.
3. Have good relationships to enhance our wellbeing.
4. Meaning – Devote our time to do something greater than oneself.
5. Accomplishment based on success or happiness.



**Wong's Self-transcendence model:**

1. Have the courage to embrace all emotions and learn to maintain inner peace.
2. Assume responsibility to do what is right and good in spite of limitations.
3. Seek connections with our true self, with others, and with God. Treat others not as instruments for our wellbeing, but as fellow human beings.
4. Meaning – Pursue our calling or life goals which are constitutively and intrinsically good.
5. Accomplishment based on becoming what one was meant to be – a decent human being, who remains true to their calling.

## WHAT IS EPP? WHY IS IT NECESSARY?

- The Mandala tree is a symbol of flourishing through suffering according to existential positive psychology (PP2.0).
- The roots represent the process of acceptance and endurance of suffering.
- The tree with its trunk, branches, and fruits represents the process of self-transcendence.
- This Mandala tree is predicated on 1) the co-existence of good and evil, and 2) the need to integrate both good and evil in order to flourish.





## The Three Treasures of Existential Positive Psychology (PP 2.0):

- All of these treasures of EPP can be accomplished only through the process of dialectical interactions between Yin and Yang and the process of self-transcendence (Wong et al., 2021).

(1) True positivity is the ability to see the light in darkness.

(2) True success is to embrace the dark side of life and turn it into the foundation for achieving your highest value.

(3) The good life is a balancing act between opposites.

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

The words of truth are always paradoxical.

– Lao Tzu

## INCREASING EMPIRICAL SUPPORT FOR THE NEED FOR AN EXISTENTIAL-SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

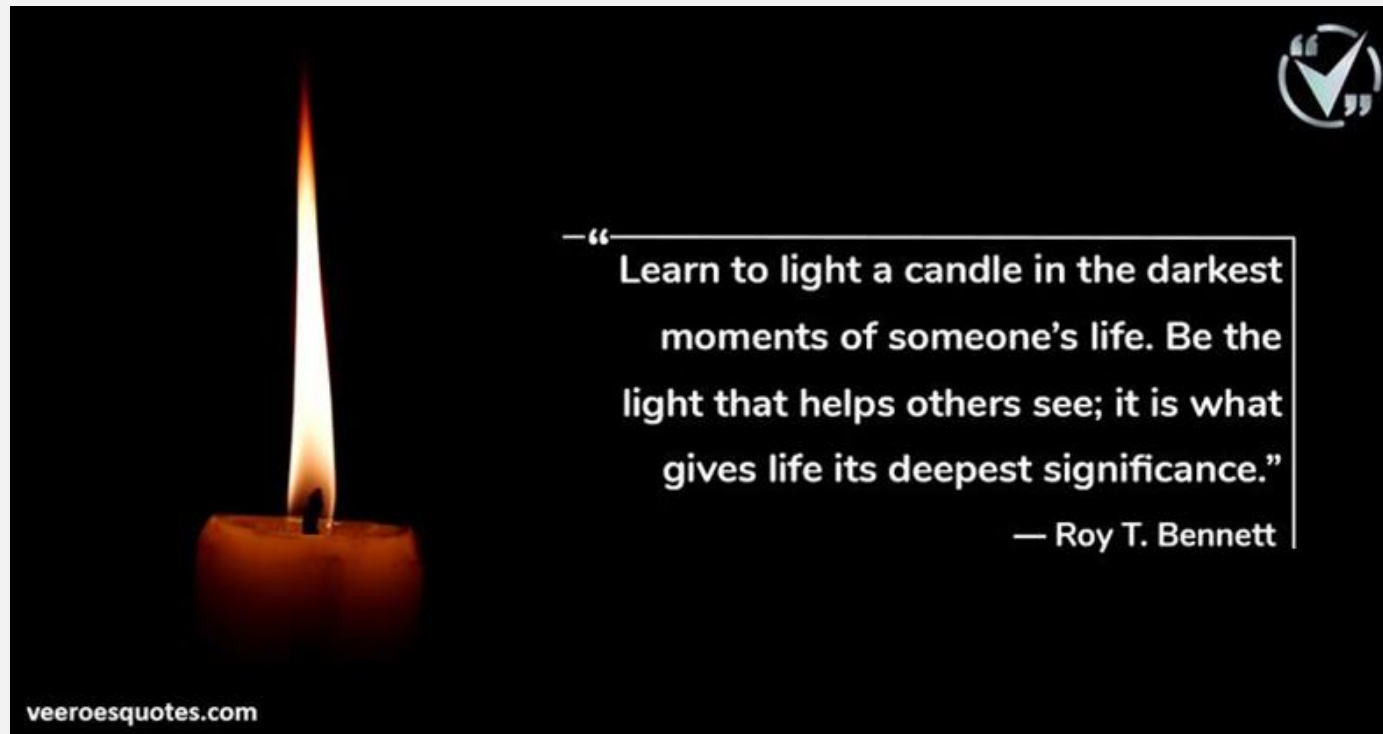
- There is a lot of research findings showing that faith, hope, and love are important for wellbeing and flourishing (Wong, 2023b).

*Faith*  
makes all things possible.

*Hope*  
makes all things work.

*Love*  
makes all things beautiful.

- The mission of EPP is to help people see the light and be the light in the darkness.
- No matter how small my light is, I still hope to rekindle a million candles even in my old age.
- Together we are stronger. With God's help, let us all strive to be the light for those in despair and spread true positivity wherever we go.



### 3. BIBLICAL SUPPORT FOR EPP

- This is one of the many promises in the Bible regarding the abundant life for those who believe in Jesus and do good work by working with Him.

# ABUNDANCE

BIBLE VERSE

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GOD IS ABLE TO  
BLESS YOU  
ABUNDANTLY, SO  
THAT IN ALL THINGS  
AT ALL TIMES,  
HAVING ALL THAT  
YOU NEED, YOU  
WILL ABOUND IN  
EVERY GOOD WORK

**2 Corinthians 9:8**

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# HOW THE PARADISE WAS LOST AND RESTORED

- The code of positive mental health is hidden in Genesis Chapter I. It describes the Golden Age of humanity before everything went wrong.
- Such a blessed life was conditional on one obeying God's command – Do not eat the forbidden fruit of knowing good and evil. As soon as they crossed this line, all hell broke loose.
- People continue to violate this fundamental rule and play God. If God is dead, then anything is permissible, from mass murder to brutal dictatorships.
- Thus, fearing God and obeying His commandments is one of the spiritual principles for restoring the paradise lost.

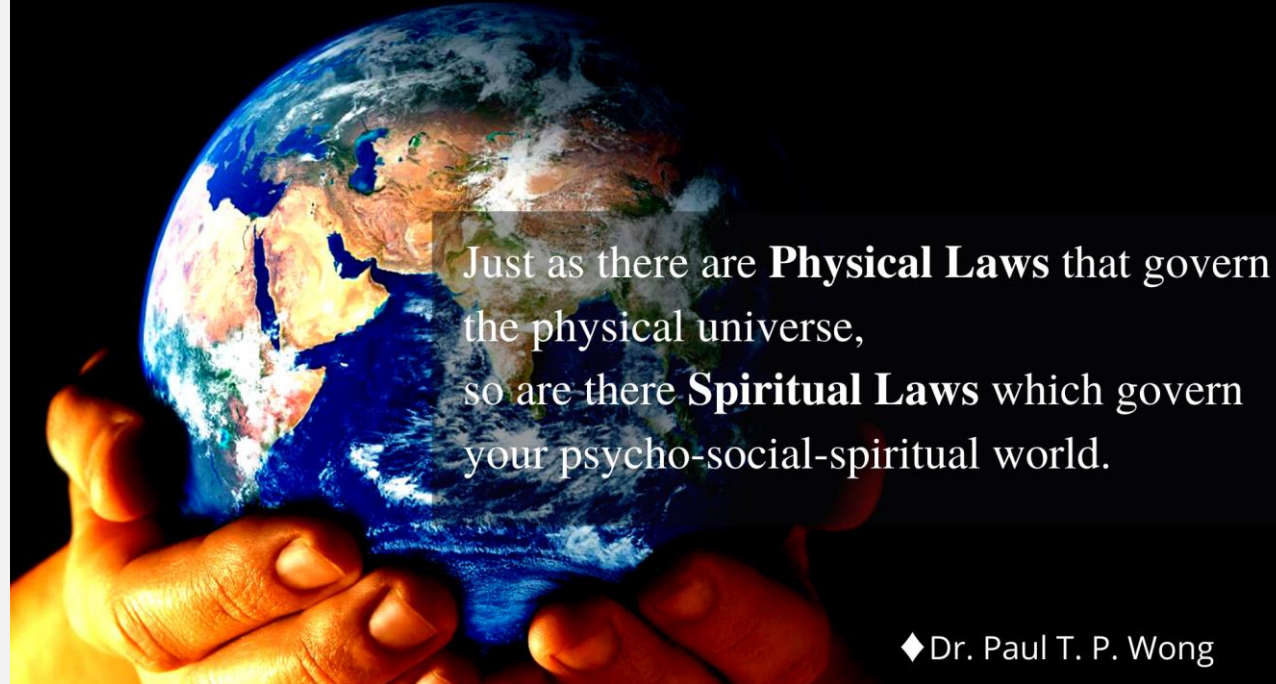


# THE 3 SPIRITUAL LAWS

that govern your relationships and contribute to your positive mental health:

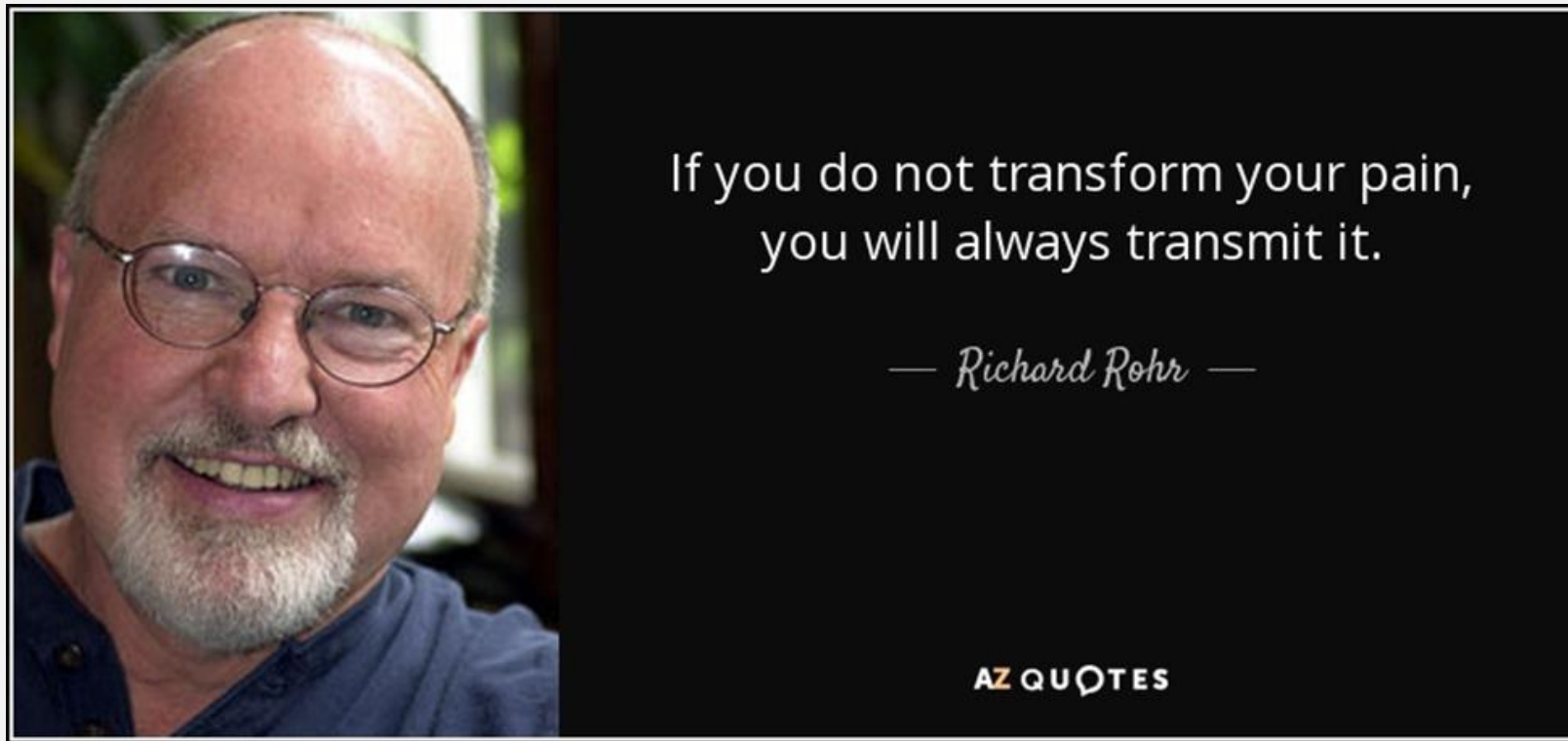
- 1) **Love yourself** by staying connected with your calling and becoming what you were meant to be.
- 2) **Love others** and make a unique and significant contribution to your family, community and humanity.
- 3) **Love God** with all your heart, soul, and mind so that you can attain oneness with the Creator and his creation.

A meaningful life is the result of following the above spiritual laws.



Just as there are **Physical Laws** that govern the physical universe, so are there **Spiritual Laws** which govern your psycho-social-spiritual world.

- Here is another spiritual law: Transforming pain into healing and wellbeing is an imperative.



- Neglecting hard Shadow Work can lead to the unconscious transmission of unhealed pain to those close to you.
- This can manifest in human evil of inflicting suffering on others.



## The Laws of Human Flourishing

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

If all truths are God's Truth, then God's laws for human flourishing are consistent with the natural laws of flourishing according to social science research.

Here are a few examples from the framework of existential positive psychology research:

**1) There will be no resurrection without crucifixion** – there is no rebirth without death to the old life or sick soul (see William James).

**2) We reap what we sow and those who sowed tears will reap joy** – the law of cause and effect says that good seeds will produce good fruits only when we take good care of the soil and the plant.

**3) Hope never dies as long as we believe in the almighty God** – hopeless hope (tragic optimism) depends on self-transcendence and faith in an Ultimate Rescuer.

In short, according to both Biblical teaching and psychology research, we cannot flourish without the discipline of sacrificial suffering, working hard, and faith in God or a Higher Power.



- We need to be freed from inner demons and made whole in order to achieve flourishing.
- Suffering is essential for spiritual transformation and character development.

## What does the Bible have to say about Human Flourishing?

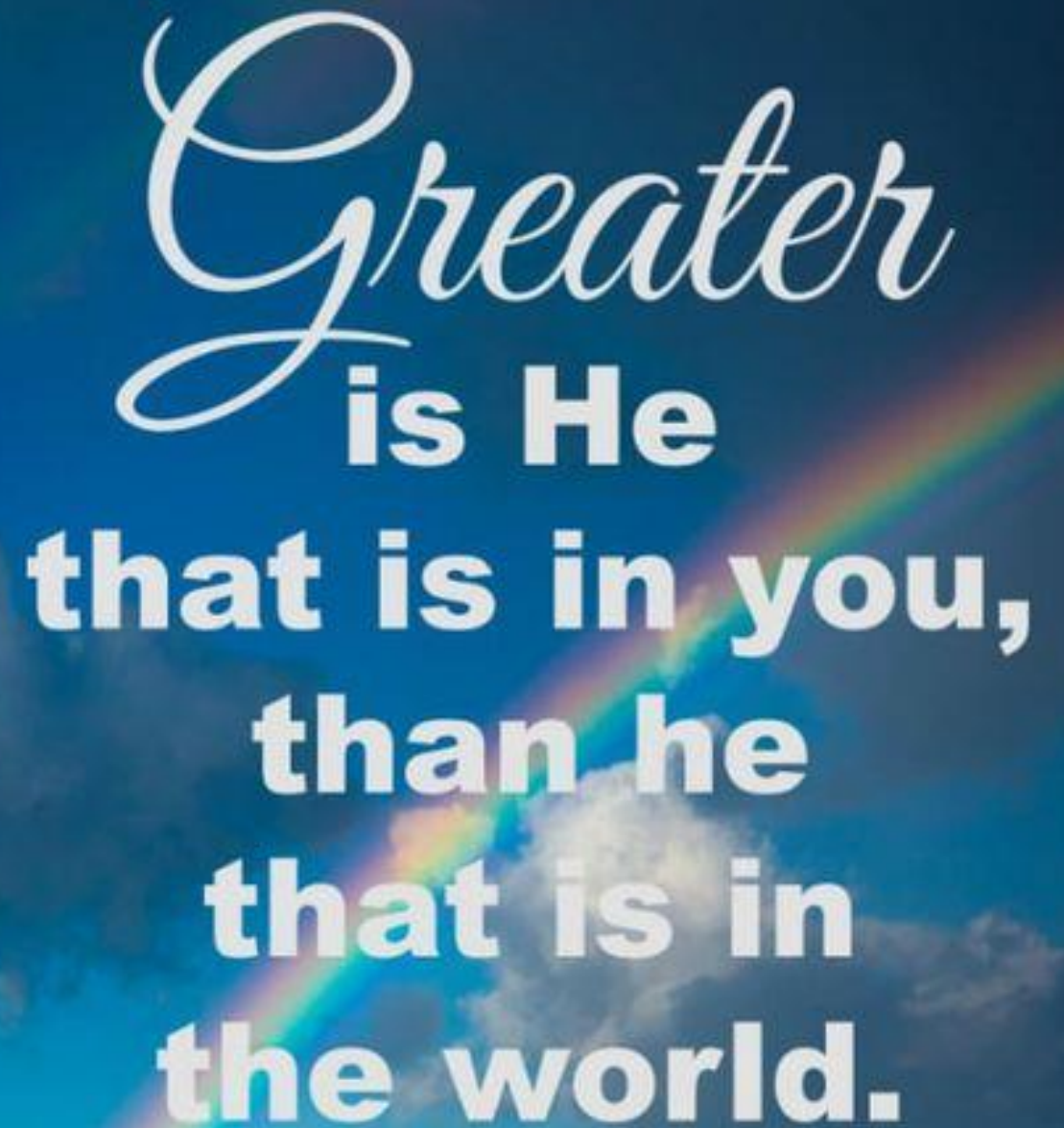
Seeing so much unhappiness and misery in my clinical practice and in my observation of all the well-to-do families, I have been struggling with this question: Why?

I discovered that the main causes of their unhappiness are the **7 deadly sins**. Therefore, the most promising path to human flourishing is through the gates of overcoming sin and suffering. Paradoxically, these are what people habitually do in order to be happy: the ambition to be number one, the insatiable desire to have more, carnal desires for sex, wanting to ruin those who are better than they are, anger towards anyone preventing them from getting what they want, avoiding work and seeking pleasure, and indulging in consuming what makes them happy. Therefore, adaptation or returning to the baseline is not the real problem for decreasing happiness; it is the natural sinfulness which positive psychologists dismiss as negative thinking.

**PP 2.0 takes the opposite view**—we can be happy and **virtuous** to the extent that we are able to overcome the deadly sins and other human weaknesses through pursuing truly meaningful and worthy life goals according to our conscience.

Vice	vs	Virtue
Pride		Humility
Greed		Generosity
Lust		Chastity
Anger		Meekness
Envy		Kindness
Sloth		Diligence
Gluttony		Temperance

- The obstacles, oppositions, and enemies may seem overwhelming.
- But faith is the answer – God is greater than all our problems.



*Greater*  
**is He**  
**that is in you,**  
**than he**  
**that is in**  
**the world.**

1 John 4:4

- The defiant human spirit and existential courage are always with you in defeating all the Goliaths in your life.

**YOU NEED TO FIND  
DAVID'S FIVE STONES  
BEFORE YOU CAN CONFRONT  
ANY GOLIATH IN YOUR LIFE:  
FAITH, HOPE, LOVE,  
COURAGE, AND RESPONSIBILITY.**

**◆ DR. PAUL T. P. WONG**

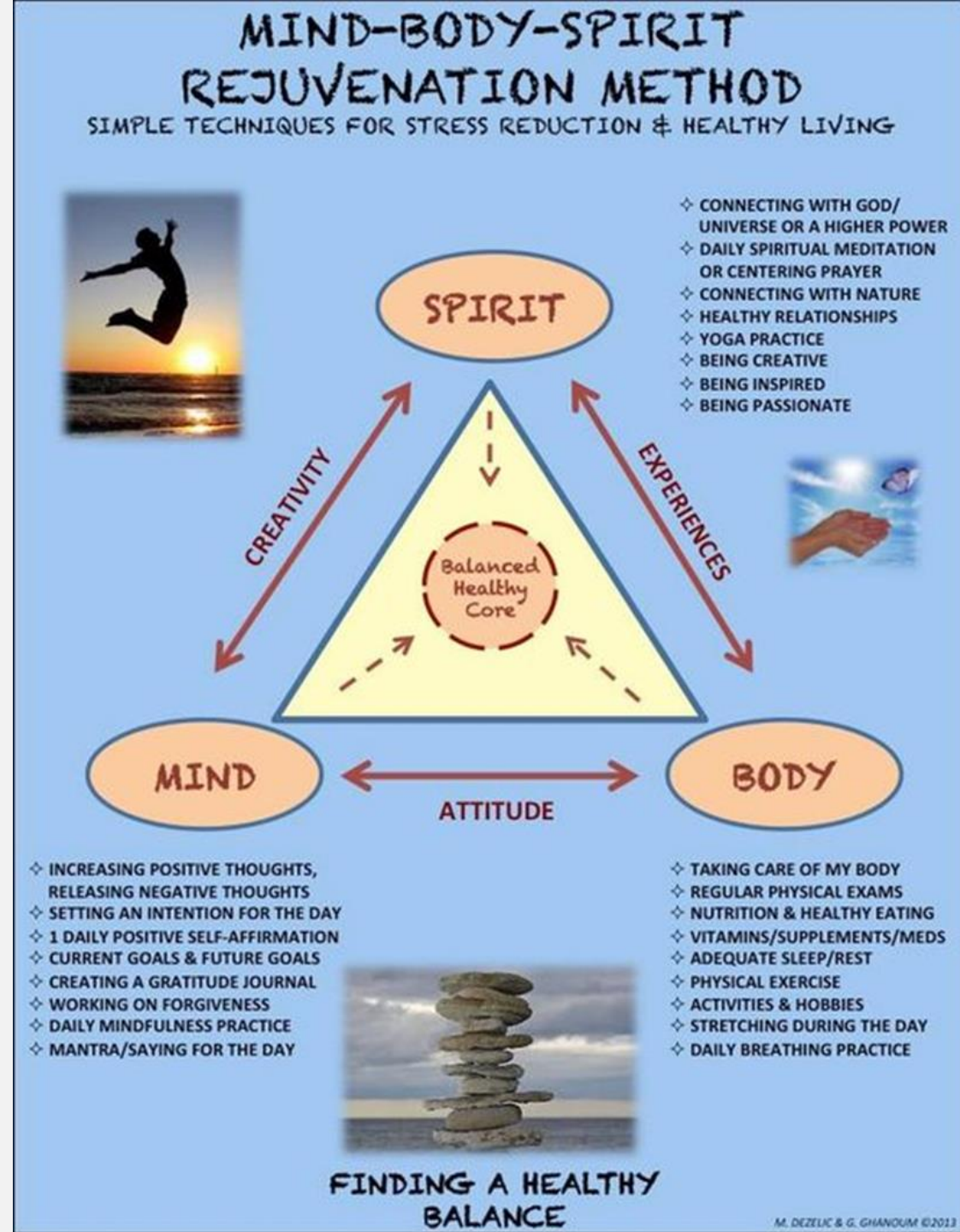
"Unless you confront your Goliath,  
nothing will change."

- Wendy Parker



## 4. THE SPIRITUAL PROCESSES FOR ABUNDANT LIFE & SUSTAINABLE FLOURISHING

- *Mind-Body-Spirit Rejuvenation: Simple Techniques for Stress Reduction and Healthy Living* incorporates Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy & Existential Analysis.
- Can be used as daily check-ins. We all need reminders sometimes.
- More information on could found on [www.drmariedezelic.com](http://www.drmariedezelic.com)



# SPIRITUAL AWAKENING FOR THE NEED TO CHANGE AND REDEMPTION



“Courage is  
necessary to  
make being  
and becoming  
possible.”

Rollo May

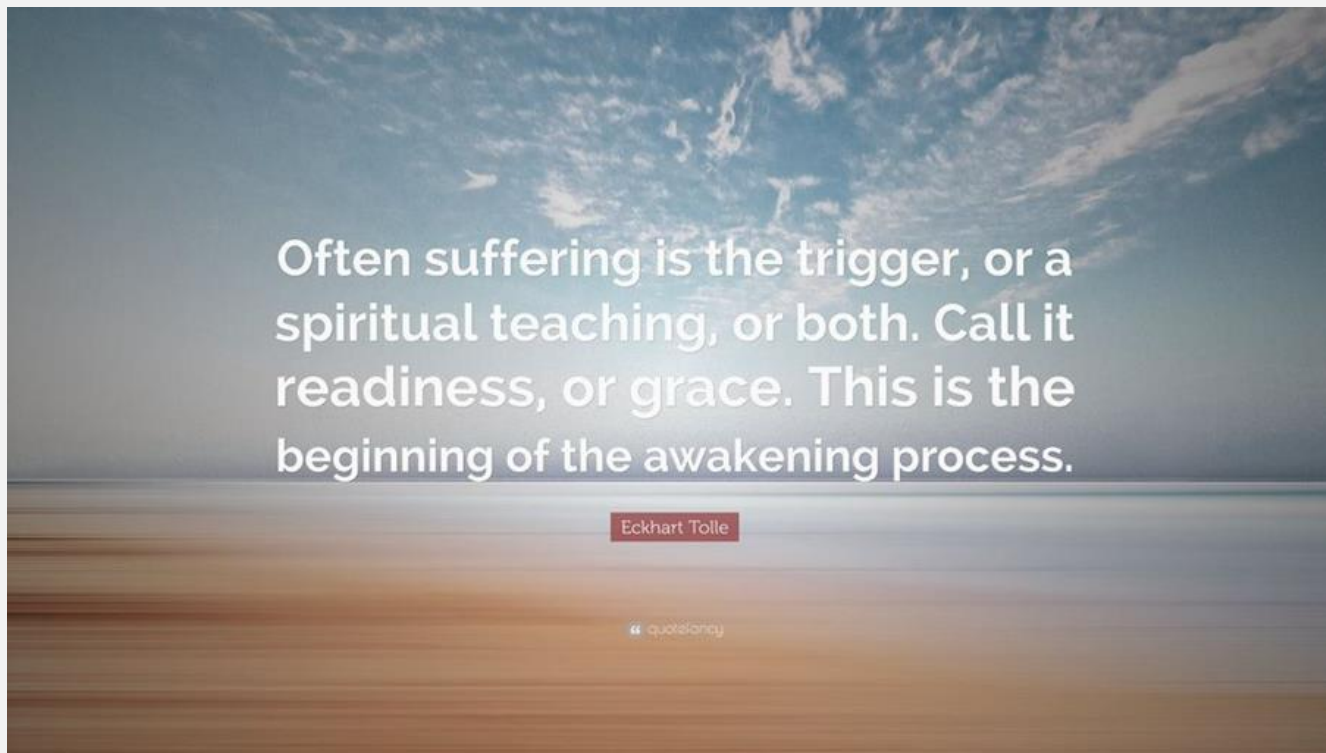
## Yes to Life

When death seems to be the only way out of your overwhelming predicament, why not challenge yourself with the courage to say “Yes” to life, no matter what?

Yes, we all need existential courage in order to survive and thrive in a chaotic and dangerous world full of trials and tribulations. There are at least 4 types of existential courage fundamental to existential wellbeing:

1. The courage to stay alive in spite of all the adversity, absurdity, and uncertainty.
2. The courage to believe in God or a Higher Power without all the evidence demanded by a rational mind.
3. The courage to become what you are meant to be in spite of all the obstacles and dangers.
4. The courage to do what is right and meaningful rather than what is expedient.

- Most people seek happiness from pleasure, wealth, fame, or power, but at the end, such pursuits will only bring disillusion and suffering.
- Paradoxically, the narrow and difficult path of pursuing meaning and spirituality is the key to happiness.
- We need to be awakened to the truth that the end of suffering is the beginning of true happiness because learning wisdom and virtues is needed for true happiness.



- We also need courage and virtue to endure, overcome, and transform inescapable suffering.
- To be enlightened also means that we begin to understand that the best way to view life is not to wear a rose-colored lens or a dark lens, but a clear lens to see reality exactly as it is, with both bright and dark sides.

All human unhappiness  
comes from not facing  
reality squarely, exactly  
as it is.

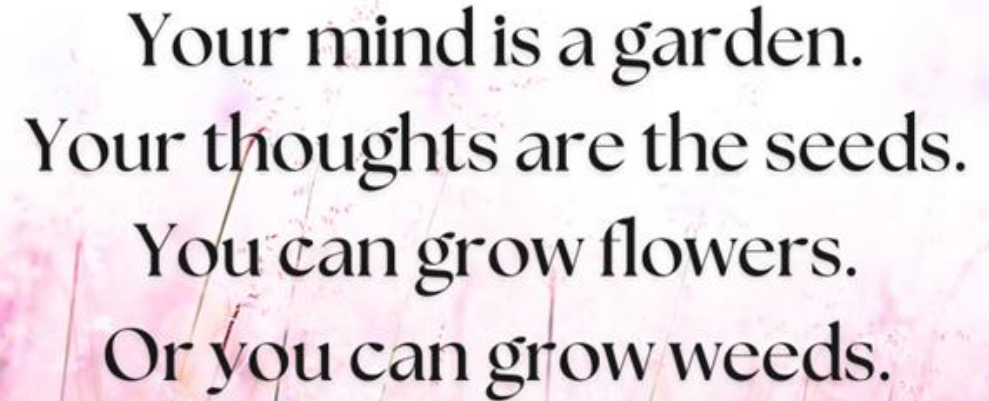
*Buddha*



## THE PROCESS OF DYING TO ONESELF AND TO THE WORLD

- We reap what we sow; therefore, make sure we sow good seeds.
- Seeds need to die before they can grow and multiply: “Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains merely a seed, but if it dies it produces a mighty crop” (John 12:24).
- We need to cultivate the soil and remove toxic weeds.

## PP and Human Flourishing



Your mind is a garden.  
Your thoughts are the seeds.  
You can grow flowers.  
Or you can grow weeds.

It's fantastic to see that human flourishing is now a dominant concept in positive psychology. It's a reminder that the seeds we sow determine what will grow and thrive. Let's keep this in mind as we continue to work towards a better world for ourselves and others.



- We need to die to our ego, the flesh, and the world.
- “For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the father but from the world.” (1 John 2:16)

**EGOTISM IS THE  
SOURCE AND  
SUMMARY OF ALL  
FAULTS AND  
MISERIES.**



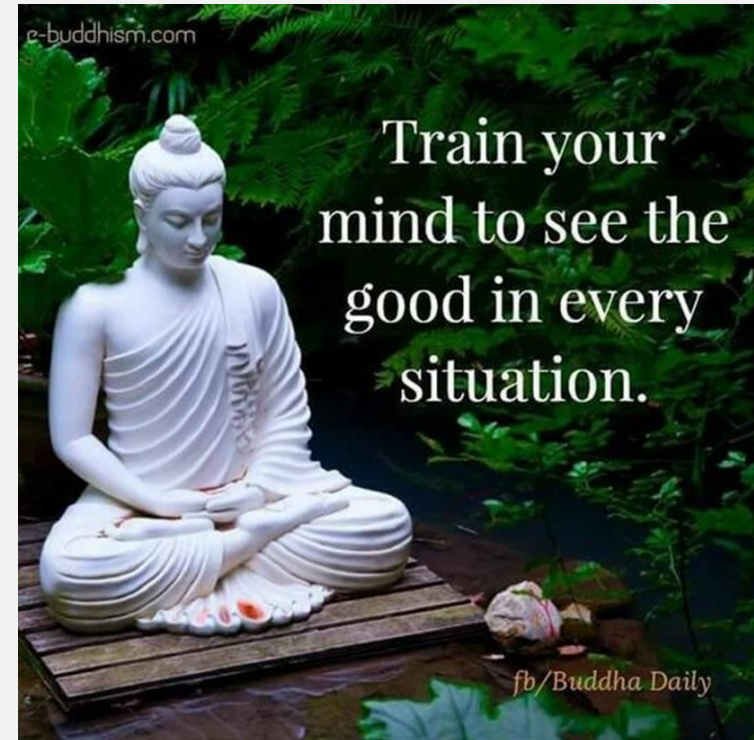
**Thomas Carlyle**  
Scottish philosopher

*QuoteHD.com*

(1795-1881)

# THE PROCESS OF REGENERATION OR REBIRTH

- You need to develop a meaning mindset (Wong, 2012) in order to see what is good, true, and beautiful in every situation.



# THE PROCESS OF PERSEVERANCE AND GOING DEEPER

## The Roots of Perseverance

**Perseverance** is the behavior of persisting until completing a difficult task or winning a marathon.

But what are the roots of perseverance?

On the basis of all my research and clinical experience on persistence, here are main roots:

1. Discipline of endurance.
2. Physical and mental strength or stamina.
3. History of intermittent reinforcement.
4. Faith in one's own skills and likelihood of success.
5. Faith and hope in God's spiritual resources.

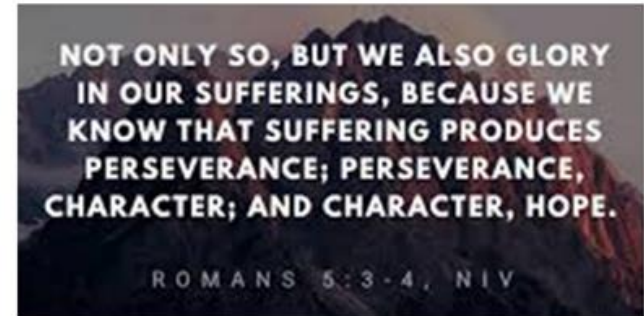
According to Netflix's reality show "Physical:100" (Ho-gi, 2023), winning is typically based on the first 4 factors, and there is scant mentioning of religious faith.

But for believers, religious faith is an important factor in winning a race like the flying Scotsman (Hugh, 1981) or winning a political war like Abraham Lincoln (Spielberg, 2012) and Mahatma Gandhi (Attenborough, 1982).

Speaking for myself, as an 87-year-old man, I could have given up many times. What are the roots of my perseverance in blazing a new trail in spite of near-death experiences, declining physical and mental strengths, and resistance to my new paradigm?

What keeps me going is my Christian faith that God has called me to be a lone voice in the wilderness. I can hear all the heroes of faith, such as Job, Moses, and Apostle Paul cheering me on. I can also witness that God's power is made perfect in my weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9) and I can even rejoice in suffering and persevere (Roman 5:3-4).

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong



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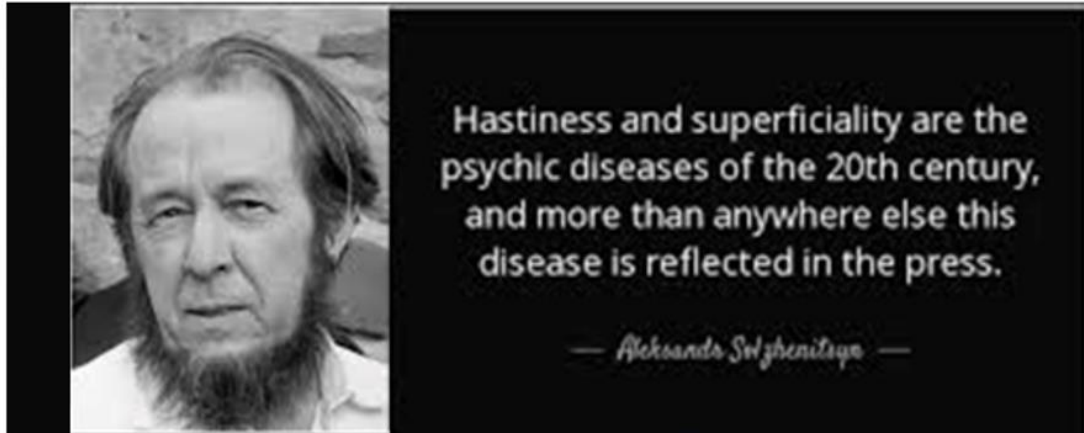
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# The Consequences of Shallowness

Shallowness is an inevitable outcome in a culture that favors anything quick and easy, from fast food and instant coffee, to quick money and instant fame. Without taking time to develop deep roots and establish deep relationship, we will suffer from shallow or even fake relationships which can never satisfy our deep-seated longing for love and friendship.

Remember Lady Gaga's song "Shallow"?

"I'm off the deep end, watch as I dive in  
I'll never meet the ground  
Crash through the surface, where they can't hurt us  
We're far from the shallow now"



◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

# The Necessity of Endurance

Your dream will remain a dream if you do not embrace the discipline of enduring hardships, failures, and suffering.

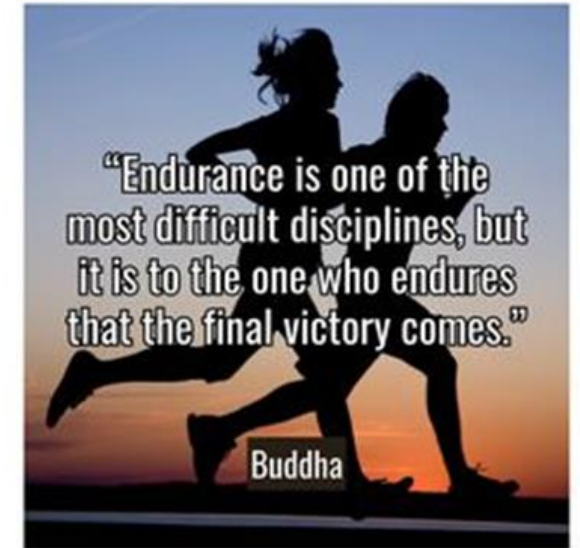
Your soul's deepest yearning is a fulfilling meaningful life, which can only be achieved through an overall re-orientation from quick and easy superficial happiness to a life with deep and wide roots.

Britton (2009) recognized endurance as the 25th character strength in addition to the VIA's 24 character strengths (see the VIA Institute on Character).

Other deep roots necessary for sustainable flourishing and existential wellbeing include radical acceptance of the horrors of being, unwavering faith in God in spite of pain, and hopeless hope in the darkest hour. Together, this group of deep roots can be called the soul virtues.

This overall orientation towards the deep life needs to be preceded by awakening or enlightenment about one's need to die to one's old self, followed by the processes of redemption, regeneration, and transformation, resulting in abundant spiritual fruits of peace, joy, and love.

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong



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No tree,  
it is said,  
can grow to heaven  
unless its roots  
reach down to hell  
—C.G. Jung

## THIS IS EXACTLY THE TRUTH OF RESILIENCE AND MATURE HAPPINESS

I have been writing about during the last 20 years (Wong & Bowers, 2018). The height of our achievements in resilience, character strength, or happiness depends on the depth of our roots in experiencing and transforming suffering. There is no other way. That is why we should rejoice in suffering, in spite of all its painfulness and disruptions, because some of the most beautiful, most precious qualities in us, such as meaning and virtues, are the fruits of suffering (Frankl, 1985; Wong, 2018).

Dr. Paul T. P. Wong ♦ 2020

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- No suffering, no endurance.
- No endurance, no character.
- No character, no spiritual fruit.

## **We rejoice in our sufferings,**

knowing that suffering  
produces **endurance**,  
and endurance  
produces **character**,  
and character  
produces **hope**.

-Romans 5:3-4

- What can I do when my struggle to fulfill my life dream seems futile?
- Why doesn't God listen to my desperate cry for help?
- Have I reached the end of my rope?
- After decades of research, my answer may surprise you: Just digging deeper and deeper is the best way to transform your suffering into triumph (Wong & Worth, 2017). This is the process of growing stronger.

YOU SAY YOU HAVE  
TRIED **EVERYTHING**

**DIG DEEPER**

YOU FEEL LIKE THERE'S  
**NOTHING LEFT INSIDE**

**DIG DEEPER!**

YOU'RE GETTING **'OK'** RESULTS...

**DIG DEEPER!**

YOU MAY HAVE **ACHIEVED**  
**A LOT** IN YOUR LIFE

**DIG DEEPER!**

- When you feel that you have reached your limit physically, that is when your indomitable will and unwavering faith enables you to dig deeper into your inner resources and reach higher for God's help.
- Your character and faith become stronger and stronger as you go through your deepest hell over and over again. Your dark night of the soul enables you to see the emptiness of the world and your need for purification:
- “It is in the depths of our suffering that we can find the true light that guides us towards God.” (Saint John of the Cross, 1577/1959).
- Those who refuse to explore and experience the dark night of the soul are doomed to live a shallow life, emotionally and spiritually.

**STRENGTH DOES  
NOT COME FROM  
PHYSICAL  
CAPACITY. IT  
COMES FROM AN  
INDOMITABLE  
WILL.**

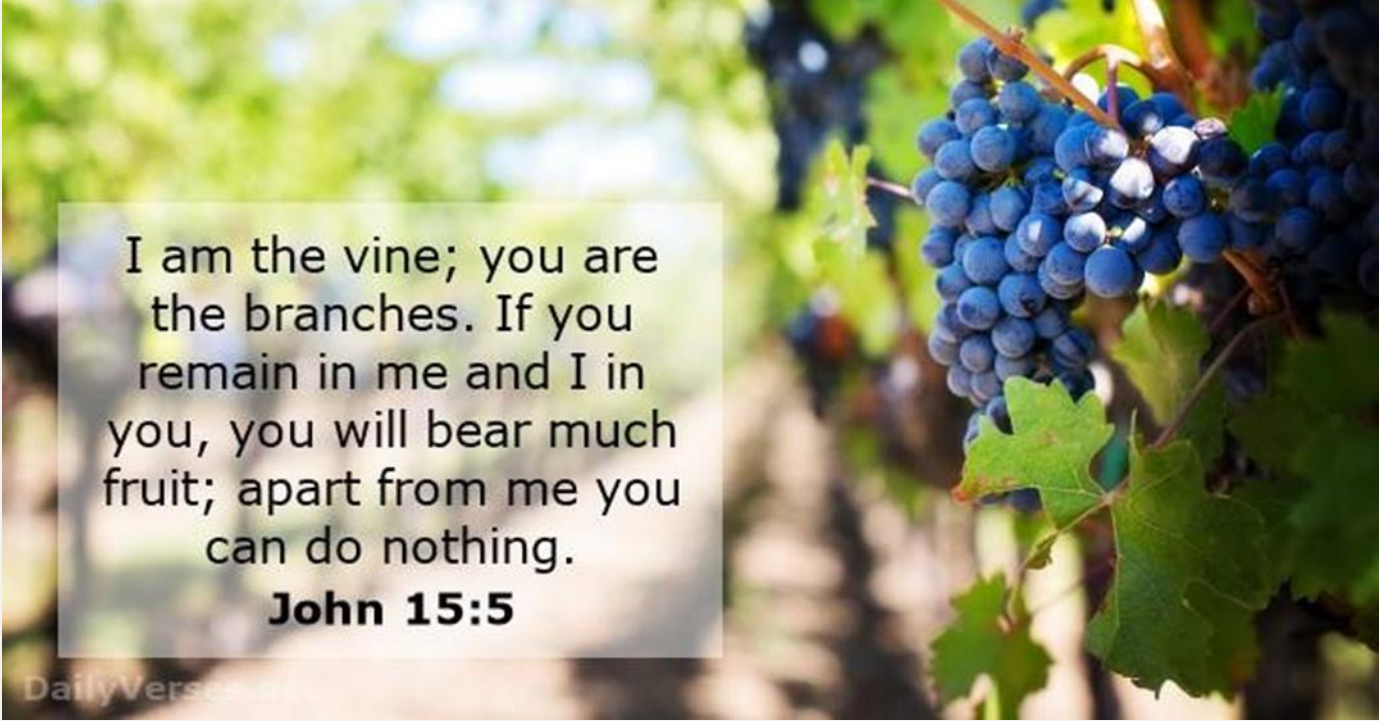


- You need to go deeper in order to get higher because you need to develop a deep foundation or a deep root system in order to support growing higher.
- You also need to go higher in order to get deeper because you need to be inspired by highest ideals and transcendental values.
- You become stronger and stronger because of your cultivation of the vertical dimension of life.



## THE PROCESS OF PRODUCING SPIRITUAL FRUIT

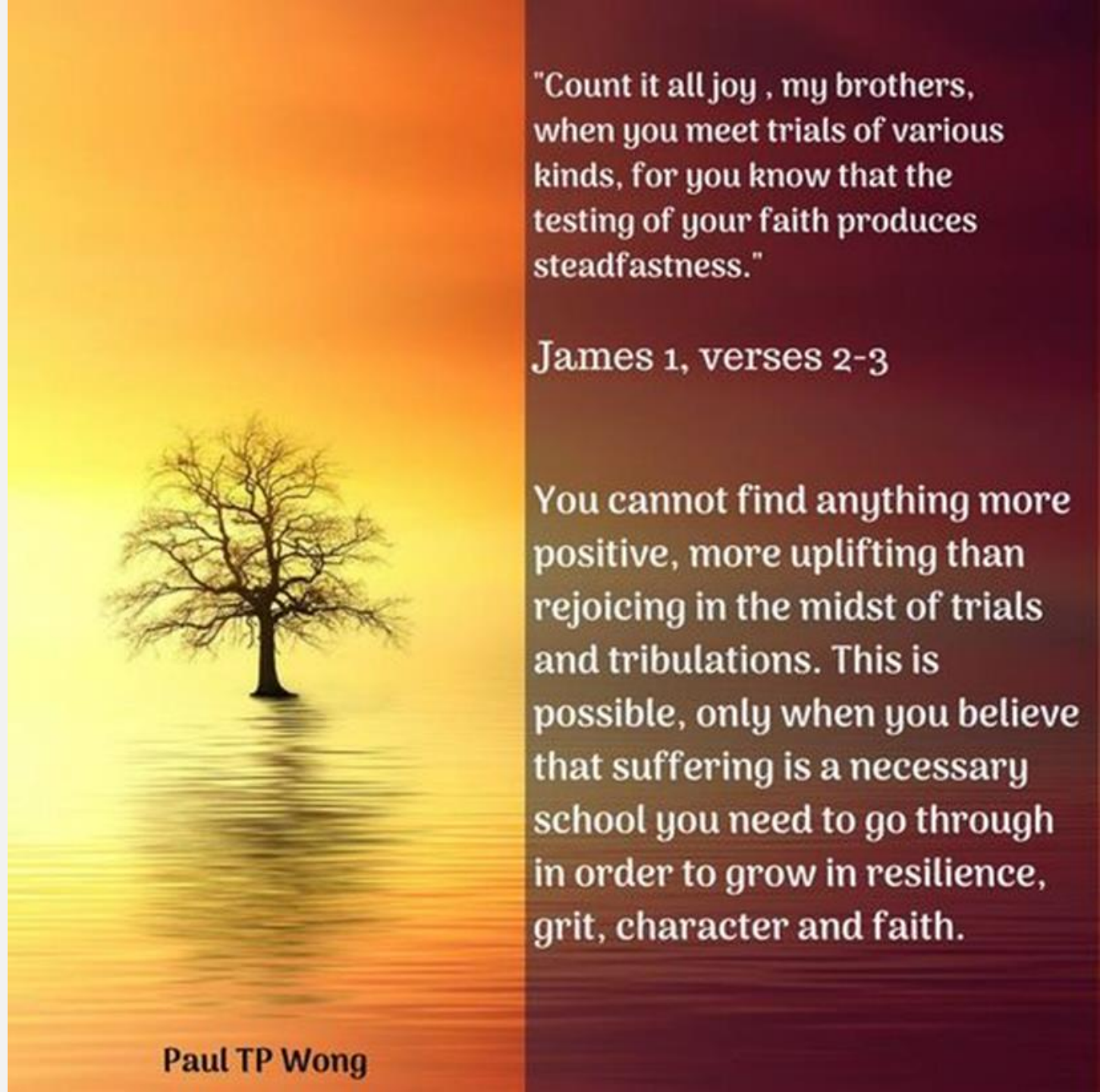
- We need to abide in Christ or stay connected with God.



I am the vine; you are  
the branches. If you  
remain in me and I in  
you, you will bear much  
fruit; apart from me you  
can do nothing.

**John 15:5**

- True positivity is joy in times of suffering.



"Count it all joy , my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."

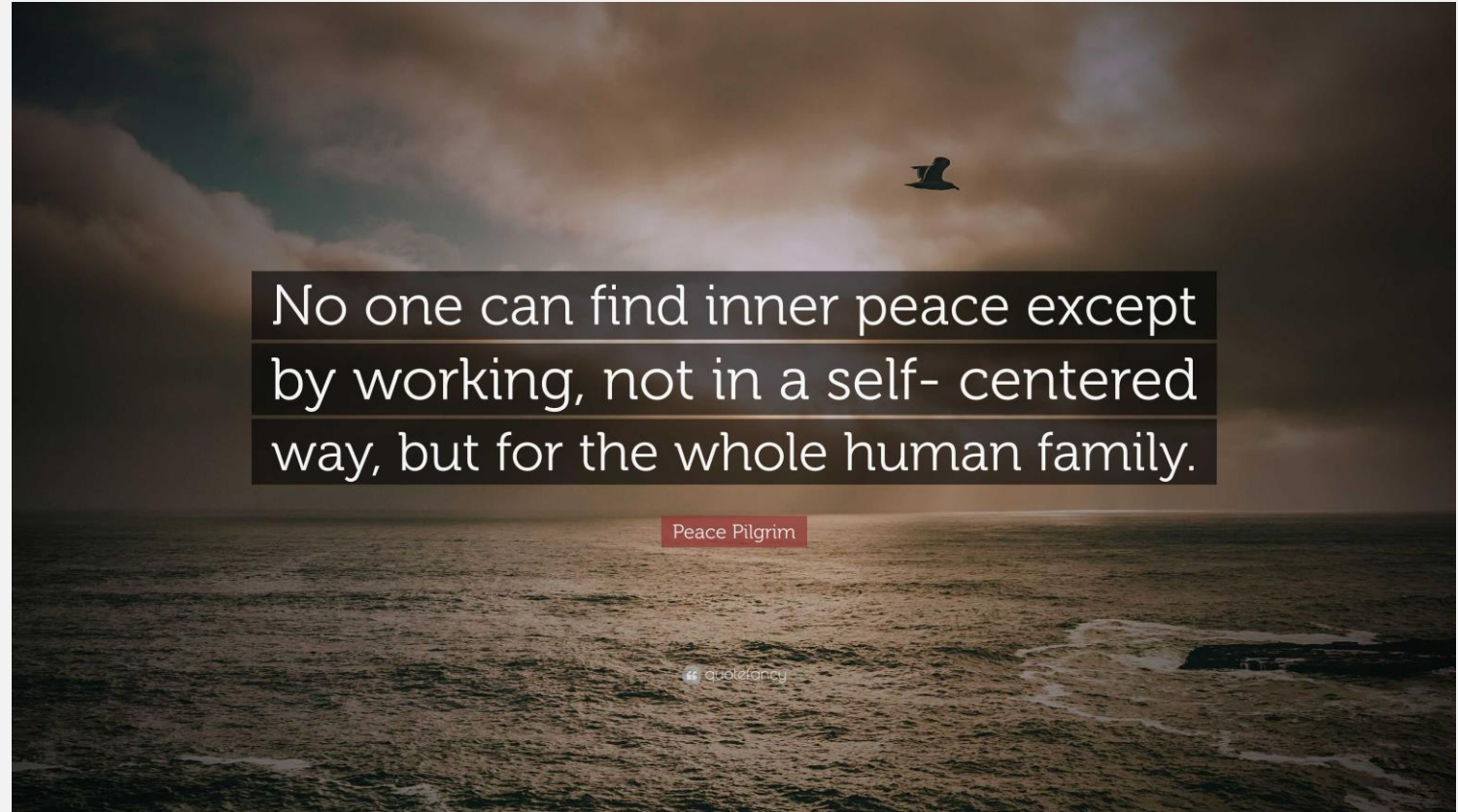
James 1, verses 2-3

You cannot find anything more positive, more uplifting than rejoicing in the midst of trials and tribulations. This is possible, only when you believe that suffering is a necessary school you need to go through in order to grow in resilience, grit, character and faith.

- “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.” (Matthew 12:33)

BUT THE FRUIT OF THE  
SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY,  
PEACE, PATIENCE,  
KINDNESS, GOODNESS,  
FAITHFULNESS,  
- GALATIANS 5:22

- Inner peace and joy come from serving others and humanity.
- One needs to re-orient from egoistic concerns to self-transcendence.



- Any tree that bears spiritual fruit must be rooted in the fullness of Christ.
- From the Biblical perspective, God is a suffering God, and He appeared in this world in the person of Jesus Christ in order to free us from suffering.
- According to Viktor Frankl's spiritually oriented therapy, "The salvation of man is through love and in love."



~Ephesians 3:17-19(KJV)~

**That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.**

# THE POSITIVE SUFFERING MINDSET

- The best possible life in a world full of difficulties and uncertainties is to cultivate the **Positive Suffering Mindset (PSM)**.
- We can cultivate PSM through the following processes of self-transcendence:
  - The dialectic mindset – how to navigate opposites and discover the optimal balance.
  - The resilient mindset – how to endure and transform suffering.
  - The transcendent mindset – how to transcend all limitations through faith, hope, and love.
  - The growth mindset – how to grow taller by going deeper.
- Every rejection makes me stronger. Every blow makes me more resolved. Every pain makes me more compassionate.



- We want to conclude our presentation with this prayer.

## My Daily Mantras for Resilience & Flourishing

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

Thank God for everything.

Praise the Lord.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

With God, nothing is impossible.

Fear not for God is with me.

God is my refuge.

Show me your way O Lord, and grant me your wisdom.

Please help so and so.





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