

24. *Positive Emotions That Turn On the 12 Powers*

If you haven't read the 1907 story of Charles Fillmore practicing spiritual healing, I recommend going to the start of this section and thinking through what Charles did on that occasion. In short, he was mystical, not metaphysical, with her. We must do the same in our ministry when it comes to spiritual healing.

This insight looks at the relationship between metaphysics and mysticism from the lens of modern psychology. This is important because pastoral ministry is filled with opportunities for missteps. It's too easy to follow spiritual teachings and wind up in the weeds regarding human psychology. So we need the guardrails of science to keep us out of the weeds if we do pastoral ministry at all.

Examples of metaphysical overreach in human psychology.

Let me give a few examples of how pastoral ministry can wind up in the weeds:

1. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a series of channeled messages came to Helen Schucman, a trained, secular psychologist. The voice that came to her said, "This is a Course in Miracles, please take notes." When the messages were published in 1975, the book's opening

line read, "Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God."

2. In 2001, Unity published *The I of the Storm: Embracing Conflict, Creating Peace*. It's an excellent book on how awareness of our perceptions and experiences can help us resolve conflicts and live peaceful lives. The opening chapter, *No One is Against You*, quotes a Hindu ascetic who says, "Can you see how everything that is *for* you or *against* you has its roots within you?"

3. In March 2020, two influential leaders of the Unity church in Baltimore told me, "The coronavirus does not exist in my consciousness," They criticized my decision to cancel services, saying that a decision not to offer the service would be based on fear.

Why we need guardrails in pastoral ministry.

The trouble I have with all three of these stories is what they say makes sense to a healthy rational brain, but what they say is counter-intuitive to a healthy emotional brain. This is a problem because a fundamental benefit of religion is that it is the only way we are able to "bind together" various aspects of life. Religion binds together the human race, communities, and marital relationships. Psychologically, religion binds together the subconscious and conscious mind. Spiritually, religion binds human beings with God. The above examples may be valid metaphysical assertions, but they are not likely to foster compelling mystical experiences.

I have intentionally called it counter-intuitive because intuition is how the healthy emotional brain thinks. That

is a real problem unless the concerns of the emotional brain are resolved.

Further, all three stories deal with fear, which originates in neither the emotional nor the rational brain but rather in the reptilian brain. In the 3rd story, regarding coronavirus, I replied in a letter to the congregation, “Don’t let anyone shame you for experiencing fear, nor acting on fear, if fear nudges you to a healthy respect for things to be avoided, like the coronavirus.” Two weeks later, I was out of a job.

Many people have been helped by studying *A Course in Miracles*, and *The I of the Storm* has now been the foundation for Unity’s teachings on conflict resolution for twenty years. Having said that, none of these stories provide me with a genuinely satisfying explanation of the role of fear in metaphysical Christian theology. We need to do better. Until then, I will trust the guardrails.

What the guardrails might look like.

The guardrails I propose are an overlay of theology and neuroscience. I sense that metaphysics is a function of the neocortex, which we call the rational brain, and mysticism is a function of the limbic system, which we call the emotional brain. If that assumption is valid, then whatever science may tell us about the relationship between the rational brain and the emotional brain is also true about the relationship between metaphysics and mysticism.

From there, we can go in many directions. But at least we have some guardrails grounded in science and

generally accepted by everyone. In other words, if we use language from metaphysics or mysticism while pastoring to others, then we are obliged to pass them through the filter of scientific research to make sure they are sound.

Positive emotions.

I am not a trained psychologist, but I know one very well who has guided my thinking over several decades. Our many discussions have made me aware of a powerful new area of research in psychology, known as Positive Psychology, which is the scientific study of how people flourish, individually and collectively. Two experts have helped me in this area of study. The first is Barbara Frederickson, author of *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research Reveals How to Embrace the Hidden Strength of Positive Emotions, Overcome Negativity, and Thrive*. The other is George Vaillant, who wrote *Spiritual Evolution*.

Barbara Frederickson is the world’s leading researcher on how positive emotions expand consciousness and lead to human flourishing. (In Unity, we refer to flourishing as prosperity.) Frederickson says that positive emotion can be thought of as a “switch” that turns on an internal capacity we have to flourish. She has identified ten positive emotions and encourages those who wish to flourish to cultivate them in their moment-to-moment thinking. The emotions she studies are joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love.

She also teaches that the “internal capacity we have to flourish” is a “broadened” consciousness upon which we

can “build” a better, more flourishing life. In Unity speak, an affirmation or denial temporarily expands consciousness so that divine ideas may flow. Anger and fear constrict our receptiveness to divine guidance and ideas.

Her research is pure quantitative academic study. She surveys people who nurture positive emotions and then studies their level of happiness and how they flourish in life. She even has a website where you can track how your day went and how you are flourishing.

George Vaillant is a well-regarded Harvard researcher who has made some discoveries very similar to what we get from Barbara Frederickson. I have found his work especially helpful because he strongly associates positive emotions, religion and spirituality, and human flourishing. An abstract of a paper he submitted in 2008¹⁹⁰ says:

Eight positive emotions: awe, love (attachment), trust (faith), compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, joy and hope constitute what we mean by spirituality. These emotions have been grossly ignored by psychiatry... Specific religions, for all their limitations, are often the portal through which positive emotions are brought into conscious attention. Neither Freud nor psychiatric textbooks ever mention emotions like joy and gratitude. Hymns and psalms give these emotions pride of place. Our whole concept of psychotherapy might change if

¹⁹⁰ George E. Vaillant, *Positive emotions, spirituality and the practice of psychiatry*, NIH National Library of Medicine. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22013350/>

clinicians set about enhancing positive emotions rather than focusing only on negative emotions.

In the 1990s, I read Vaillant's book *Wisdom of the Ego*, which changed my view of human nature. His recent book, *Spiritual Evolution*, has changed my view of spirituality and religion. So I've been doubly blessed. I often go to his books for insight and guidance.

Positive emotions and The Twelve Powers.

I believe that what Frederickson and Vaillant have discovered is a key to understanding Unity's teachings on the Twelve Powers.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, my many discussions with my psychologist friend have enabled me to map the twelve powers taught by Charles and Cora Fillmore with the positive emotions studied by Frederickson and Vaillant.

Is there a one-to-one correlation between a positive emotion and a power? Can that positive emotion be used as a "switch" to activate the power? And can an affirmation, denial, or simply a leading question nurture the internal feeling of a positive emotion? If so, we may conclude that The Twelve Powers, a metaphysical teaching, works when they are triggered by positive emotions, which are mystical.

Here is a mapping of the emotions that might turn on the twelve powers.

¹⁹¹ Twelve Emotions That Turn On the Twelve Powers. <https://www.truthunity.net/mark-hicks/twelve-positive-emotions-that-turn-on-the-twelve-powers>

Power	Emotion	Questions that trigger the emotion
Will	Interest, Desire	What do I really want?
Understanding	Awe	What is the greatness of this?
Faith	Hope* ¹⁹²	What is the best that come out of this?
Imagination	Clarity, Focus	What does my desire look like?
Zeal	Purpose, Passion	Who inspires me?
Power	Mastery, competence	I can do all things through Christ
Love	Love*	How does God see this?
Judgment	Gratitude	What is the gift in this for me?
Strength	Peace*, serenity	Peace, be still
Order	Joy*	God is in charge
Elimination	Lightness	I am free
Life	Pride	How can I make a difference?

The pastoral caregiver can go a long way by asking these questions that trigger positive emotions. For example, Richard Billings once told me that Georgiana Tree West mentored him by asking, “Richard, is that what you really want?” The question unleashed interest and desire in his power of Will, which led him to choose to become a Unity minister. I always ask people I interview, “Who inspires you?” That question, in my experience, unleashes

¹⁹² *Hope, Love, Peace, Joy.* You might notice that four of these positive emotions are the four themes of Advent. Why do we celebrate Advent with four positive emotions? And why do we celebrate Christmas with twelve powers? It may come from Spirit, but it rests in the limbic system.

purpose and passion, awakens the power of Zeal, and often leads to an eloquent conveyance of one’s true vision.

So what we have here is a clear scientific explanation of how the Twelve Powers enable human flourishing. What makes this so important is that it confirms the Twelve Powers and the interaction between metaphysics and mysticism. It is a useful method for pastoral counseling that is both theologically powerful and scientifically sound.

Neuroscience and metaphysics.

I have claimed several times in this credo that metaphysical Christianity is the future of Christianity. I believe that what will carry metaphysical Christianity in the future is not philosophy or books but instead its alignment with the best of neuroscience and psychological discovery.

It just might be that one day scholars will discover a new layer of the brain — a spiritual layer that encompasses the rational neocortex, the emotional limbic system, and the primitive reptilian brain — a layer that is a channel to a benevolent, transcendent God, active each moment in our life, triggering our every desire, capturing our every fear and calling us to be still and know that all is well. If so, the metaphysical Christian message of oneness, wholeness, and prosperity may, at last, be confirmed by science. Who knows?