

LIFE BALANCE: THE NEED FOR BLESSEDNESS IN OUR LIVES

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In order to live successfully in this world, barring unavoidable accidents or disease, one must live a relatively 'balanced-needs' existence. Since humans were created in the image of God, they have a definite internal structure. Psychology and some philosophy are attempts to discover and understand how to best give expression to what we are in our humanity. One particular view that I think is on the correct track, although it is incomplete, is Glasser's Choice Theory (1998).

Choice Theory recognizes five basic, internally driven impulses that are directly linked to the genetic makeup that is common to all humans:

1. survival,
2. love-belonging,
3. power,
4. freedom, and
5. fun.

Without the fulfillment of these innate 'needs', humans will not thrive. How these needs are fulfilled is also important. Glasser distinguishes between responsible and irresponsible methods of need fulfillment. Responsible fulfillment meets these needs in ways that do not hinder others' legitimate attempts at meeting their own needs or harm others directly in the meeting of our own. Irresponsible methods do hinder and do harm.

Choice Theory is helpful. It shows us that behavior is primarily an internal attempt to fulfill innate human needs in a particular social and environmental setting. We are not mere responders to our external environment. Choice Theory, however, does not give a complete view of humans. Therefore, if anyone were to follow it as stated by Glasser, he or she would lead an incomplete and unbalanced life. In the Fall 2002 issue of *The International Journal of Reality Therapy*, I tried to make the case for the addition of a sixth need that would help to encourage a more balanced view of ourselves and life in general. I also developed a virtue chart that related the proper expression of each need with virtuous traits and

unbalanced need fulfillment with vice.

"Using this word I want to stress three things: 1) Human well-being requires attention be given to things beyond self and human relationships as suggested by our expansive intellectual abilities. 2) Human well-being requires a sense of awe and wonderment in order to 'feel' attached to something beyond self. One characteristic of unhappy people is their self-absorption. 3) A sense of blessedness helps us recognize real priorities on which to build our lives. Mere money making and *business* lose their sense of importance to one who has cultivated blessedness. Unmodified capitalism corrupts both the sense and striving for the Blessed in our lives. The need for blessedness is common to humankind but absent from animals. Animals seem content when food abounds and their surroundings are peaceful. That is not true of humans.... Everyone has this capacity, some more, some less, and when it is allowed to guide and inform our lives we are better off, we sense a central blessedness in our inner beings. Humans need a sense of blessedness to function as they were created and designed by their Creator" (Skeen, p. 17).

I do not see "blessedness" as merely a satisfying experience, as many other experiences we have. The "blessedness" I am talking about is the kind that makes us better, more virtuous, godly people.

| Choice Theory Needs | Deficiency | Mean (Enough) | Excess |
|---------------------|------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| freedom | dependent | interdependent | autonomous |
| power | | neglectfulness | helpful |
| freedom | | gullible | cautious |
| power | | docile | tenacious |
| belonging | | unfeeling | fair |
| power | | vacillating | firm |
| belonging | | restrictive | friendly |
| power | | careless | analytical |
| fun | | austere | sober |
| power | | easily distracted | diligent |
| belonging | | combative | cooperative |
| power | | pliable | resilient |
| survival | | self-indulgent | health-minded |
| belonging | | wasteful | conservation-minded |
| | | | miserly |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| belonging | self-oriented | civic-minded | others-oriented |
| power | cowardice | courageous | rash |
| power | obsequious | principled | dogmatic |
| survival | reckless | secure | invincible |
| power | pretentious | ambitious | ruthless |
| power | disorganized | organized | rigid |
| belonging | sectarian | loyal | slavish |
| belonging | indifferent | supportive | submissive |
| belonging | pessimistic | optimistic | permissive |
| power | low self-estimation | self-confident | arrogant |
| fun | ascetic | temperate | licentious |
| power | impulsive | patient | over-enduring |
| belonging | shameless | modest | shy |
| blessedness | *bio-psycho-emotional | Satiation | *Connectedness to |
| God, Nature and Creation | *Pride that strives for personal | divinity | and/or superiority |
| blessedness | Vulgar | Awestruck | Intellectualistic |

_____Deficiency_____ Mean (Enough)_____ Excess_____

The successful fulfilling of the six needs is central to experiencing complete happiness, both now and hereafter. While individual differences and circumstances allow for a wide variety of need-meeting behaviors, general categories can be identified. Below is a chart showing how the six basic needs break down into general categories. It is the individual who fills, or does not fill, the general categories with specific behaviors. It should be pointed out that good societies provide the social environment necessary for successful pursuit of these needs by all of its citizens. Individuals can mess up their lives by selfish, foolish, and harmful need-meeting behaviors but a good society at least provides the circumstances to make success a real possibility. How well a society does this can be used as a measure by which to judge that society as good or bad, or somewhere in-between, and give social planners an indicator of what improvements need to be made.

Instead of dividing humans into parts, it can be helpful to divide their functions.

SURVIVAL

--Air --Food --Water
 --Body Functions --Shelter --Health
 --Exercise --Sex

LOVE/BELONGING

*Friendship *Cooperation *Involvement
 *Caring *Relationships *Connected
 *Companionship *Intimacy *Collaboration

POWER

*Importance *Competition *Recognition
 *Achievement *Competence *Attention
 *Respect *Skills *Being Heard
 *Impact *Pride *Significance

FREEDOM

*Choices *Independence *Options
 *Liberty *Autonomy *Moving Around
 *Physical *Psychological

FUN

*Enjoyment *Pleasure *Learning
 *Relaxation *Laughter

BLESSEDNESS

+Contemplation +Imagination +Wonderment
 +Meditation +Mental Focus on and Possession of
 intangibles (infinite, eternal, abstract, virtue)

Thomas Traherne (17th century pastor and philosopher) over three hundred years ago saw that desires and internal wants are key to understanding humans. "Wants are the Bands and Cements between God and us. Had we not wanted we could never have been obliged. Whereas now we are infinitely obliged because we want infinitely" (1960, p. 24). Desire is what moves us generally, and toward God specifically. Where Choice Theory falls short, Traherne excels. Traherne eloquently teaches us that humans were made for relationship with God. And that to deny this aspect of our nature expression is to "wound [ourselves] (1960, p. 177)." While teaching us about ourselves, he wrote some insightful and inspiring

things. Following are just a few.

Thomas Traherne in *Centuries*:

"By humanity we search into the powers and faculties of the Soul, enquire into the excellencies of human nature, consider its wants, survey its inclinations, propensities and desires, ponder its principles, proposals, and ends, examine the causes and fitness of all, the worth of all, the excellency of all. Whereby we come to know what man is in this world, what his sovereign end and happiness, and what is the best means by which he may attain it. And by this we come to see what wisdom is: which namely is a knowledge exercised in finding out the way to perfect happiness, by discerning man's real wants and sovereign desires. We come moreover to know God's goodness, in seeing into the causes wherefore He implanted such facilities and inclinations in us, and the objects and ends prepared for them. This leadeth us to Divinity. For God gave man endless intellect, to see all things, and a proneness to covet them, because they are His treasures; and an infinite variety of apprehensions and affections, that he might have an all-sufficiency in himself to enjoy them; a curiosity profound and unsatiable to stir him up to look into them: an ambition great and everlasting to carry him to the highest honors, thrones, and dignities: an emulation whereby he might be animated and quickened by all examples, a tenderness and compassion whereby he may be united to all persons, a sympathy and love to virtue; a tenderness of his credit in every soul, that he might delight to be honored in all persons; an eye to behold Eternity, and dwell within it; a power of admiring, loving, and prizing, that seeing the beauty and goodness of God, he might be united to it for evermore" (1960, p. 132).

"Felicity is a thing coveted of all. The whole world is taken with the beauty of it: and he is not man, but a stock or stone that does not desire it. Nevertheless great offence hath been done by the philosophers and scandal given, through their blindness, many of them, in making Felicity to consist in negatives. They tell us it doth not consist in riches, it doth not consist in honors, it doth not consist in pleasures. Wherein then, saith a miserable man, doth it consist? Why in contentment, in self-sufficiency, in virtues, in the right government of our passions &c. Were it not better to show the amiableness of virtues, and the benefit of the right government of our passions, the objects of contentment, and the grounds of self-sufficiency, by the truest means? Which these never do. Ought they not to

distinguish between true and false riches as our Saviour doth; between real and feigned honors, between clear and pure pleasures and those which are muddy and unwholesome? The honor that cometh from above, the true treasures, those rivers of pleasure that flow at his right hand for evermore, are by all to be sought and by all to be desired. For it is the affront of nature, a making vain the powers, and a baffling the expectations of the soul, to deny it all objects, and a confining it to the grave, and a condemning of it to death, to tie it to the inward unnatural mistaken self-sufficiency and contentment they talk of. By the true government of our passions, we disentangle them from impediments, and fit and guide them to their proper objects. The amiableness of virtue consisteth in this, that by it all happiness is either attained or enjoyed. Contentment and rest ariseth from a full perception of infinite treasures. So that whosoever will profit in the mystery of Felicity, must see the objects of his happiness, and the manner how they are to be enjoyed, and discern also the powers of his soul by which he is to enjoy them, and perhaps, the rules that shall guide him in the way of enjoyment. All which you have here, God, the world, yourself, all things in time and eternity being the objects of your Felicity, God the Giver, and you the receiver" (1960, p. 105-106).

"We love we know not what, and therefore everything allures us. As iron at a distance is drawn by a loadstone, there being some invisible communications between them, so is there in us a world of love to somewhat, though we know not what in the world that should be" (1960, p. 3).

When Traherne speaks about felicity, he is not talking about mere peaceful 'bliss' as the ordinary definition of the word might suggest. He is pointing to that condition of the soul "in which all that is good and natural [created in God's image] flows (Balakier, 1989, p. 241)." Traherne believes that knowing God and His Creation and living a virtuous life makes emotionally happier people. And reciprocally, leads to more godly living and a closer relationship with God. The key attitude is gratitude, being thankful toward God for His many blessings and gifts.

Life balance requires that the entire human personality find responsible, virtuous expression. The sixth need of blessedness draws our attention to the need for a relationship and grateful view of God Almighty, Creator of the heavens and the earth. That relationship is fulfilled and enhanced in Jesus Christ, the One through whom the Universe was created (John 1:1-5;

Colossians 1:15-17), who lowered Himself (Philippians 2:5-11) to experience our burdens and die for our sins (Hebrews 9:27-28). Jesus Christ is indeed "the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)," both now and forever.

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