

PSYCHOLOGY for THEOLOGY & MINISTRY

a workbook companion for the audio recordings

BLUEPRINT 1543





Table of

CONTENTS

01 **Project**
Introduction

02 **Workbook**
Intro

03 **Pamela Ebstyne King**
Thriving

06 **Laird Edman**
Ritual

09 **Preston Hill**
Hope

12 **Lindsey Root Luna**
Growth

15 **Tyler Greenway**
Balance

18 **Erin Smith**
Integration

21 **Kutter Callaway**
Embodiment


24 **Mark McMinn**
Presence

27 **Taking Action**
Goals

28 **Notes**
Extra space

Introduction

WHY PSYCHOLOGY?



Theology is organized reflection on God and God's relationship to the entire cosmos, but especially to human beings. **Psychology** is the scientific study of the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors of human beings. Yet, most of the time, these two disciplines sit happily siloed apart from one another.

Unless you're us.

Blueprint 1543 takes an integrated approach. In order to live full lives, solve big problems, and serve the culture, we'll need to draw on many different domains of knowledge. In this series, we're addressing questions from our audience, who wanted to know what role can psychology play in their lives and their churches.

The purpose of this WORKBOOK

I know what you're thinking. "Do I really need a workbook to listen to podcasts?"

Well, no, you do not *need* this workbook. But hear us out...

We serve universities and churches by helping faithful leaders become comfortable reaching for the "tool" of psychology - whether in ministry, life, or research. As *intellectual* as some of this work is, we don't want these "how, when, and why" questions to feel disembodied and "out there." This workbook is designed to **make it personal**. We think this work matters because it actually makes a difference in people's lives, including yours.

Here you'll find a **guide to topics** covered in each episode. You'll also find **questions for reflection** for each episode. Don't feel pressured to answer *all* of them. We encourage you to pick the ones that feel most personally relevant to you.

By the end, you will have a broad knowledge of how psychology connects with Christian life, theology, and ministry. And if you haven't already, go deeper at theopsych.com.

Blueprint1543.org

Pamela Ebstynne King

THRIVING



Pam King started working with youth in churches not long after college. She got curious about how faith made some young people so resilient when facing challenges and learned that psychology offered tools for understanding these connections. Following this curiosity connected her with her life's purpose: helping people be who God intends them to be.

Topics:

- Vocation
- Doing Science as a Christian
- Thriving vs. Flourishing
- Dementia
- Meaningful relationships
- Spiritual practices
- Personality differences
- Mental health practices
- Joy
- Purpose
- Hope
- Positive Psychology
- Emotional regulation

Reflecting on THRIVING

Pam thinks of science as a tool for getting to know and understand the inherent goodness, installed by God, in creation. Have you ever thought of the sciences in this way? Has a scientific discovery or experience of nature left you with an experience of awe?

What do you think of Pam's claim that the best scientists, regardless of world view, have a sense of intellectual humility in their research? What could be helpful about maintaining a margin of mystery when involved in truth-seeking and discovery?

What do you think of the distinction between "flourishing" (subjective wellbeing) and "thriving" that Pam makes? What is important about emphasizing the measurable contribution to one's context?

Part of having "meaningful relationships" includes both intimacy and accountability. How many relationships do you have where both of these elements are at play? Is there an aspect that's lacking?

What do you think of Pam's above/below-the-line paradigm-surviving vs thriving? What implication could this idea have for church ministry?

Reflecting on THRIVING

Pam talks about emotion regulation as not just resilience against negative emotional states, but healthy activation of positive emotional experiences, like gratitude and joy. What messages about emotion regulation did you learn from church contexts?

What are some of your personality traits (perhaps find a free Big 5 test online if you're not sure)? Do you see some ways that this informs what spiritual and wellness practices you incorporate into your life?

Do you have a sense of purpose in your life? Are the activities and tasks you find yourself involved in lined up with your strengths? Do they bring you joy? Do you see them as making a positive contribution to the world?

Do you agree that joy is a gift from God that can be attended to like a metal detector for finding our own purposeful path? Why or why not? If this is true, how would it shape your own sense of purpose?

Laird Edman

RITUAL



Nothing gets Laird more excited than talking about *ritual*.

"It's so important!" he reminds us. Rituals are tools that engage our bodies, reinforce beliefs, shape our character, and can powerfully transform social groups. Our Christian communities discern together what rituals are practiced and what they mean. But like most tools, they can be used for harm as well.

Laird offers a vision of hope for how the church can harness the power of rituals to help us become the force for good we're meant to be.

Topics:

- Cognitive science of religion
- Social bonding
- Imagistic vs. doctrinal rituals
- Music, dancing, singing, synchronized movement
- Grace vs. social exchange
- Ritual and memory
- Prayer
- Ritual and emotional regulation
- Extreme rituals
- Vulnerability and pastors
- CREDs and CRUDs

Reflecting on

RITUAL

Does it surprise you to learn that human minds are designed to be inclined toward certain types of religious beliefs? Why or why not? Sharing in rituals creates bonding in social groups. What are some ways this information could be used for positive outcomes in your life and communities?

What do you think of Laird's point that humans are cognitively inclined towards "social exchange" and thus cognitively resistant to the idea of a gracious God? Have you seen this play out in yourself or others? Do you believe in God's free grace, yet find yourself trying to earn it?

Laird implies that doctrinal rituals have the power to help shape and grow our natural intuitions over time. Are there rituals/practices that you participate in that have helped you grow or overcome challenges?

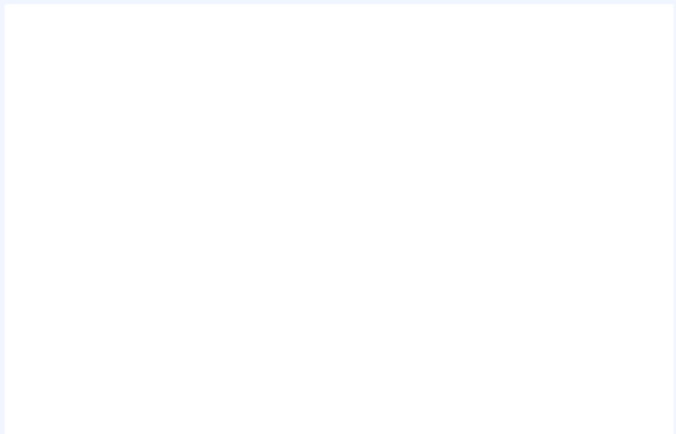
Reflecting on

RITUAL

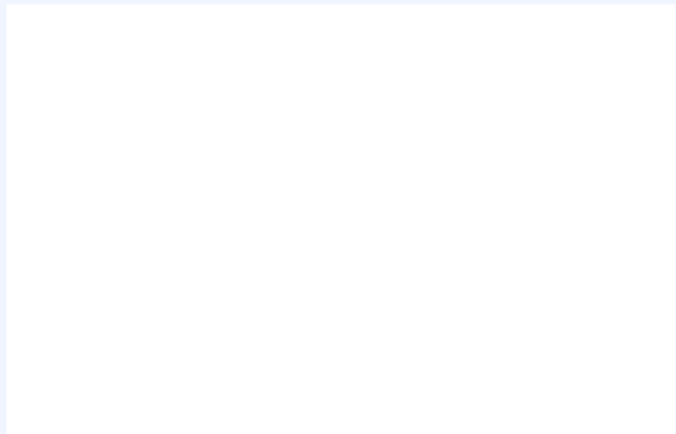
What do you think it is about mature spirituality that correlates to more praise and listening in prayer life? Have you noticed any change in the way you pray over your lifespan?



What role has music played in your life? Can you think back to moments that it played an important role in your emotional, psychological, and/or spiritual health? Are there ways you think you might be able to harness that power now to improve your quality of life given some of the features Laird pointed out?



What did the conversation about church leadership and vulnerability bring up for you? As Pam King points out, we all need a handful of relationships that are characterized by intimacy and accountability. Keeping this in mind, in your experience, do you think there's been too much or too little vulnerability in church communities? Why?



Preston Hill

HOPE



Trauma has become a prominent topic in recent decades.

But what is trauma exactly and how can Christian theology contribute to the conversation? Preston Hill has done a lot of thinking about this and has come up with powerful answers. A little research shows us that trauma has left its marks all over our broken world and that the Christian tradition, while engaging the resources of psychology, has resources to offer hope.

Topics:

- Science-integrated theology
- Ministry leadership and trauma
- Trauma responses to avoid
- Trinitarian theology for ministry
- Relationality
- Theological anthropology
- Therapeutic benefits of theology
- Qualities of trauma-safe churches
- Mental illness in Christians
- Professional therapy
- When pastors should refer out

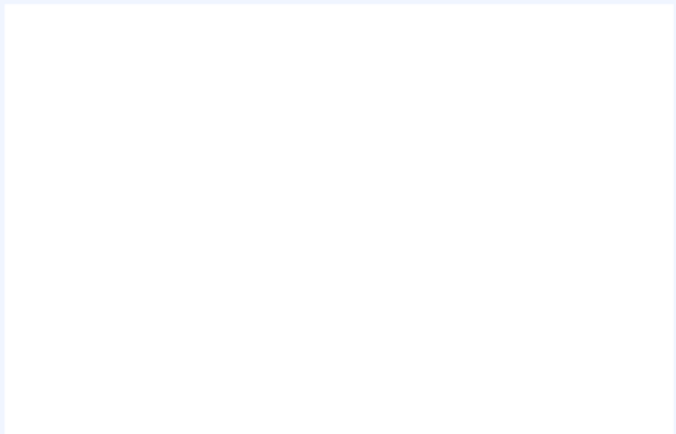
Reflecting on

HOPE

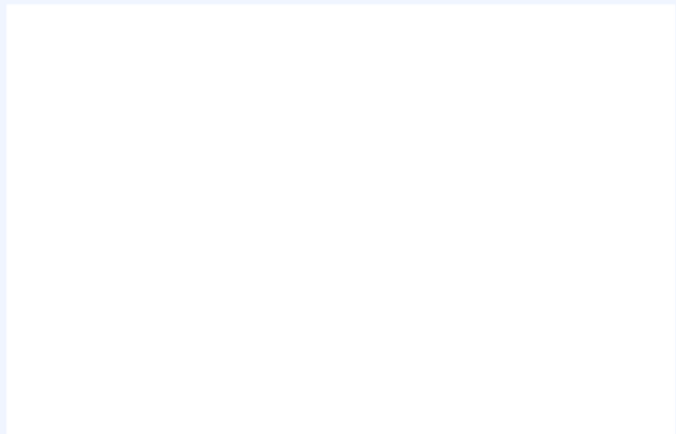
Do you recognize the extremes that Preston describes? In your experience of church communities, has there been an effort to minimize trauma (skipping over the degree of suffering in the survivor's experience) or has there been an extreme acknowledgment of trauma wounds (to the exclusion of healing and hope)?



Was there anything about Preston's definition of trauma that surprised you? What about it resonated with you, or felt a little off? (Definition: Trauma is an inescapably stressful event that overwhelms someone's coping mechanisms.)



Because of the relational dimension of trauma, Preston draws on trinitarian theology as a rich part of the salve for trauma. What stands out for you when Preston says "the Trinity is not a divine math problem"? Is emphasizing the relationality of God as part of God's essence helpful for you?



Reflecting on

HOPE

What comes to mind when you think of caring for the most vulnerable in your community and an oath of committing to do no harm in the church?

Is it new for you to think of characters in the biblical text as having levels of mental health or mental health challenges? Does anyone come to mind apart from the author of the psalms of lament?

What do you think of the idea of faithfully thriving through suffering and adversity? Were there times in your life that you would describe as thriving amid hard times, whether it's a mental health problem or something else?

Have you felt that mental health stigma in your communities? If so, what would be helpful in destigmatizing mental health conversations?

Lindsey Root Luna

GROWTH



Lindsey admits it freely - she's a science nerd. But that's because she's compelled to help folks who feel stuck in some way, get unstuck. Her research in forgiveness and its benefits bears this out, as does her clinical practice (because Lindsey likes to wear different hats). In this conversation, she helps us understand what some of those different roles look like and offers ideas about the supportive role of the church in mental health progress.

Topics:

- Clinical vs. research psychology
- The scientific method in psychology
- Science of forgiveness
- Different therapy approaches
- Discerning the right therapist for you
- Understanding mental illness
- Churches and mental illness
- Social support
- Christian Counseling

Reflecting on GROWTH

Lindsey mentions that a core part of her vocational formation was the idea of helping people who feel stuck in life. Can you think of a time you experienced that feeling? What factors helped you get unstuck?

Is there someone in your life that it's hard for you to forgive? What do you think of using psychologically proven methods to help change that? Is that a hopeful idea to you or do you feel some resistance? Why?

A lot of healing can happen through relationships. What are some examples of healing in your life that have come as a direct result of a relationship? What does our being designed for this kind of relational change say about what God is like?

Considering the previous exercise, is it clear which aspects are under your control and which are not? Where are you feeling stuck, and do you think someone could help you get unstuck? (Perhaps it's multiple people to help with the different dimensions based on their gifts!)

Reflecting on GROWTH

Take a moment to take inventory of the social support you have experienced or are experiencing now. Do you feel supported by a community of people? Or, if you were in crisis, would a few people show up for you in the way you needed?

Is there someone who you know could use some extra social support right now? Could you imagine practicing some reflective listening with them?

Lindsey draws out the idea that human beings are creatures made of different layers of interacting systems. Problems arise in our lives that have physical, spiritual, relational, and mental connected components. Consider a problem in your own life or one you've faced in the past, and list out different aspects of it that are affecting you in these different categories. In what ways is it affecting your emotions, your body, your spiritual life, and your relationships?

Tyler Greenway

BALANCE



Tyler is someone who thinks science can bring a lot of clarity to things that matter to Christians. That's part of why he ended up unexpectedly pursuing a psychology PhD after finishing a ministry degree. It's sent him down a path of helping those in ministry gain tools for helping people. He also believes that when we become more aware of our strengths, we are empowered to work on our weaknesses in a way that can help the church support people .

Topics:

- Science vs. ministry vocation
- Spiritual practices
- Personality difference
- Prayer and generosity
- Science of prayer
- Social psychology
- Virtue development
- Forgiveness research/REACH method
- Spiritual formation
- Groupthink
- Church meetings

Reflecting on BALANCE

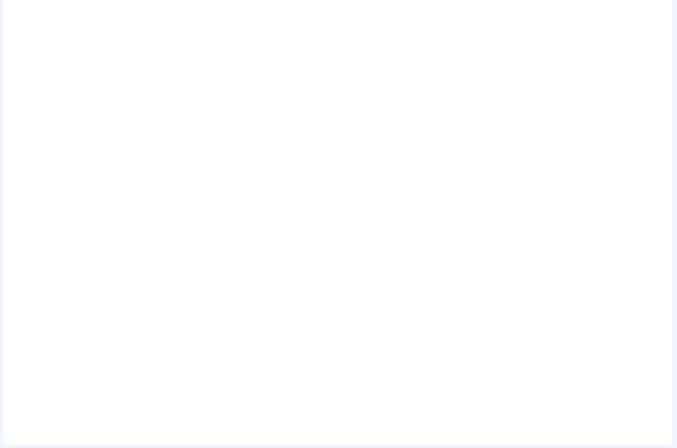
Tyler describes his “piecemeal approach” to the study of religion and spirituality. Can you think of a specific research study, related to a theological or spiritual topic, that you’d like to see done?

What did you think of Tyler’s study and the finding that praying for a group might make you slightly less inclined to be generous towards them? Do you think his hypothesis is correct, that those who were praying consistently throughout the study felt they’d already done something and thus didn’t feel an urgency to give?

Does the idea of using empirical research to help church-goers grow in virtues (like generosity, forgiveness, humility, etc) appeal to you? What virtues would you like to see cultivated in your community?

Reflecting on BALANCE

Was the Leffel Model helpful for you? Do you recognize certain emphases or strengths of your tradition that might mean a deficit in other areas?



Have you seen a problem with groupthink in your community? Are there perspectives that get silenced, or just folks who never get to share what they think? Does leadership in your church welcome questioning or is it discouraged?



Erin Smith INTEGRATION



Erin has a big vision for shaping culture. She sees a future where Christians in the sciences have a seat at the table when the world is facing big problems. Holding a psychology research-shaping position at her institution means she's in just the right spot to make a difference. We're glad her initial plans to work for a rental car company fell through!

Topics:

- Following curiosity
- Defining psychology
- Practicing as a psychologist who is a Christian
- Kids' religious beliefs and experience of church
- The church and mental health
- Levels of explanation
- Spiritual practices
- Discipleship
- Christian research universities and cultural impact
- Importance of relationality

Reflecting on INTEGRATION

What do you think of Erin's story and her "following curiosity"? Is this how you found your vocation? Or are there big, plaguing questions that you've just compartmentalized or ignored? How would your life look different if you integrated them?

Erin orients her practice of psychology to a sense of purpose, which is informed by her faith. How has your faith informed your sense of purpose in your own career? Can you get specific?

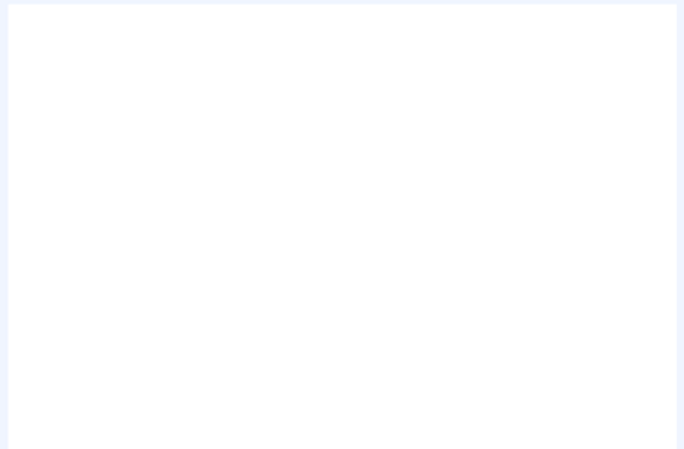
What did Erin's kids ministry studies bring up for you? Did you experience "social support" at church as a child? What were the strengths or weaknesses of your experience? Can you think of ways that science might help inform kids ministry?

Reflecting on INTEGRATION

Do you think churches could do a better job of utilizing laypeople's professional skills and strengths? Can you imagine a way this could be done in your own community and what some of the benefits would be?



What do you think of Erin's vision of a thriving research culture at Christian universities? Do you agree that this could be a powerful witness to the culture?



Kutter Callaway

EMBODIMENT



Kutter likes to give seminary students strange and unexpected assignments. Many of them have never encountered meditation practices or asked themselves "What would I write in a letter... to my body?" Kutter's dual PhDs have given him a deep appreciation for embodiment, and he thinks Christians should take this to heart. As a lifelong Baptist, he applies some of this integrative thinking to the latest scandals of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Topics:

- Seminary education
- Psychology in ministry
- 4-E Cognition
- Embodiment
- History of Psychology
- Anti-religion bias
- Naturalism/methodological naturalism
- Evolutionary psychology
- Ecclesiology
- Baptist denominational distinctives
- SBC scandal

Reflecting on

EMBODIMENT

Psychology is the study of human thought and behavior. What appeals or doesn't appeal to you about church leaders getting psych training as part of their seminary work? What concerns, if any, come to mind?

In what ways could taking embodiment more seriously transform the way we do ministry? Could taking embodiment more seriously change the way we think of spiritual formation and growth?


Kutter validates the anxiety that some people feel around psychology, partly because he's experienced an anti-faith bias firsthand. What are your takeaways from his example as a person of faith and a psychologist choosing to navigate some anti-faith spaces?

Can you think of a time when the arts helped you connect with God or experience transcendence? What's intriguing to you about using cognitive science to examine what's at play in that experience?

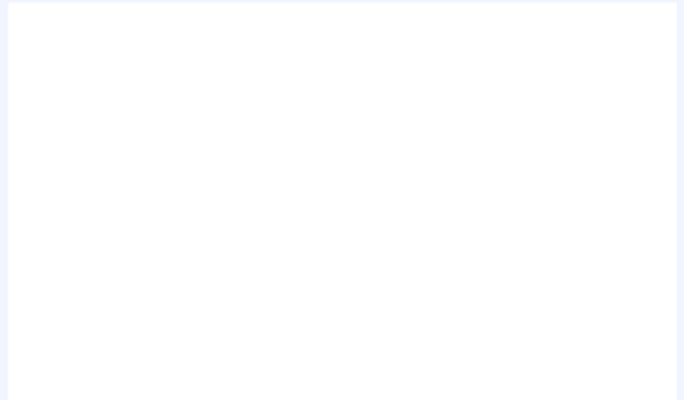
Reflecting on

EMBODIMENT

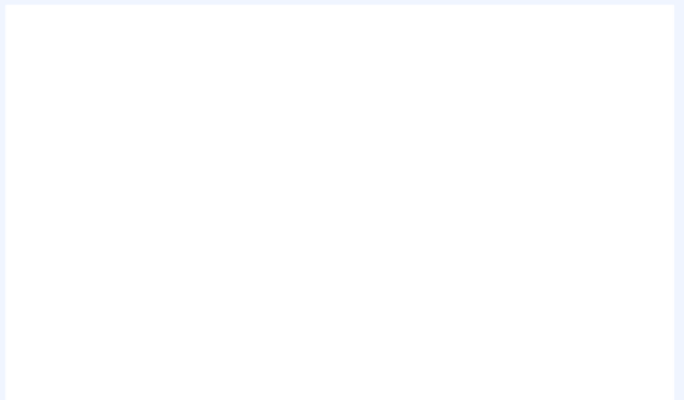
Kutter talks in detail about the strengths and weaknesses of his tradition—the Baptist denomination. Have you ever taken inventory of these types of things with your own tradition?



What do you think of Kutter's emphasis on systems? Do you agree that looking at a composite picture of human systems does bring out something that you can't see so well if you're only focused on individuals? Why?



Can you relate to the burnout Kutter mentions when one feels "connected" to more people than the human mind is capable of being concerned with? How do you balance being informed about world events and your own sense of mental overwhelm? Do you agree the local church emphasis is helpful? Or is there something else to think about?



Mark McMinn

PRESENCE



Mark McMinn made a career of showing how integration isn't just possible, but it's part of living a full, beautiful life. Living on a small farm in Newberg, Oregon, McMinn and his wife (a spiritual director and sociologist) seek to embody a life of beauty and service, which draws on both scientific and spiritual ways of knowing.

Topics:

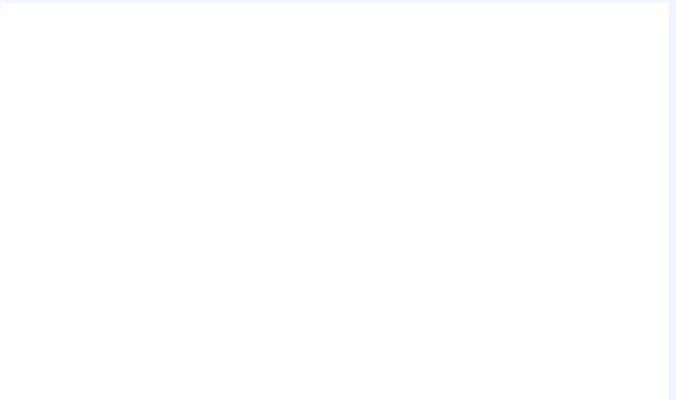
- Vocation
- Living a Meaningful Life
- Integrated People vs Concepts
- Mental Health
- Ministry
- News Burnout
- "Slow" Living
- Confirmation Bias
- Quakers
- Social Support/Loneliness
- Simplicity
- Ritual
- Grace

Reflecting on PRESENCE

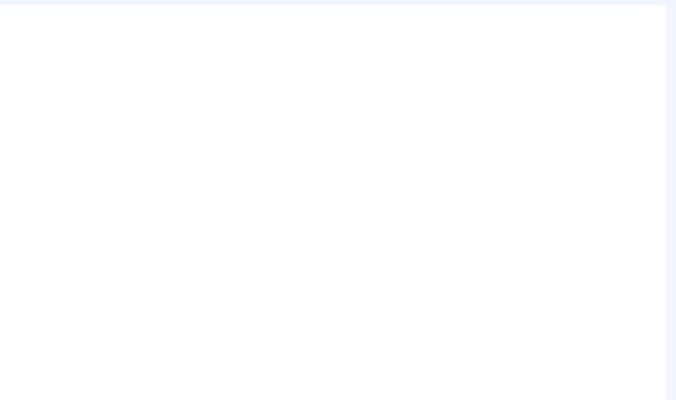
Mark's counseling practice focuses on ministry leaders. Numbers show high rates of pastors facing burnout, trauma, and contemplating career changes. What sort of initiatives and culture shifts in churches might make church leadership a more sustainable vocation?



Have you experienced the temptation to only accept scientific findings that back up what you already believe? Would there be value in actively trying to DISprove something you believe as an exercise in humility? Why or why not?



Contemplating the way faith has played a role in your life, can you distinguish between a sense of "transcendent significance" and "social significance"? How has a sense that God loves you and cares about your life made a difference to your sense of purpose and wellness?



Reflecting on PRESENCE

Many people find sense of purpose by connecting with a community of people at a church congregation. Has this been true for you? What should we think about the loss of a sense of meaning when a community becomes harmful or unhealthy?

Mark sees being able to express frustration and lament toward God at times a sign of a health for a person. Do you agree? Have you felt this freedom in your life? Are there difficult things you might need to express to God?

Do you agree that the "global awareness" technology affords us can be detrimental to mental health? What do you think of Mark's focus-shift back to local mentality? Does learning about a lot of global bad news harm your ability to take action on the things you can affect?

Taking Action

SETTING YOUR GOALS

This page is to note any action items that this audio series has inspired you toward. Is there a topic you want to learn more about? Do you want to find a therapist? Do you want to help your church develop more robust mental health support programs? Jot down your ideas here.

ACTION PLAN

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

notes

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

About BLUEPRINT 1543



Blueprint 1543 is a nonprofit developing work that draws on both theology and the sciences towards creating a better world. We consult with individuals, groups, and organizations to create robust integration strategies, research communities, and exemplary project-based work. Blueprint1543.org