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Fruit of the Spirit: Next Steps

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Fruit of the Spirit: Next Steps

Thomas G. Plante

This book has attempted to bring together many different and thoughtful expert voices among academic professionals who specialize in the integration of spiritual and religious behavior and psychology. All are well-established and serious scholars who highly value and conduct quality empirical research and writing. In addition, they come from both Eastern and Western traditions. To our knowledge, no other book is currently available that has examined the evidence-based research findings of the qualities that are articulated in the sacred scriptures regarding the fruit of the spirit in both a scholarly and applied manner.

Overall, the chapters provide support for the notion that religious and spiritual practices, behavior, and engagement are associated with improved psychological, physical, and community functioning and well-being. Religion and spirituality can make us better. The fruit of the spirit can result in a better quality of life. However, we must be mindful of the need for future quality research as well as the downside of religious engagement, too. Intolerance, rigidity, and in-group/out-group conflict can be problematic and create a situation in which this type of religious engagement can lead to fruit that is not healthy but unhealthy. This fruit can lead to violence, bias, prejudice, and cruelty: a double-edged sword, perhaps.

This book project represents the fourth edited book that our team at the Spirituality and Health Institute at Santa Clara University has now published that brings together experts and students from the various

spiritual and religious traditions in psychology, religious studies, public health, nursing, science, literature, and several other fields.¹⁻³ Our institute includes quarterly extended lunch meetings to discuss a wide variety of multidisciplinary and multifaith research, teaching, conference, and book projects as well as collaboration on many other related topics as they arise. We fondly begin our meetings with the question, "Where might the spirit lead us this time?" We are never disappointed at the end of our discussions. Our lunch table includes clergy, professors from many academic disciplines (e.g., psychology, religious studies, biostatistics, public health, engineering, philosophy, English literature) from several universities, students from a variety of disciplines, and community leaders in faith-based nonprofit social service agencies. Perhaps this institute and current book project could serve as a model of what could be done elsewhere in both professional and lay circles. We do a lot on a little lunch money.

The religious and spiritual traditions offer much. There is much to learn and celebrate when thoughtful and well-meaning people with skills and perspectives that are informed by their spiritual and religious traditions come together and learn from each other with an open, caring, and respectful manner. Having table fellowship around meals helps to enhance the working and personal relationships as well. We hope that our book project will be a contribution in the right direction for religious and psychological understanding that might stimulate further reflection, research, and application and, in doing so, make the world a better place.

Since this volume was not able to address all of the empirical and applied approaches from the spiritual and religious traditions, future books are clearly needed in our view. Future projects might continue to examine how religious and spiritual behavior and practices can be best understood and used in health promotion broadly defined. Further research may wish to expand in both the empirical and theoretical directions. Empirical research might examine how spiritual and religious engagement might be most effective with certain populations as well as what role belief in and practice of religious and spiritual activities could play in obtaining the greatest desired mental, physical, and community health effects. Future research may also investigate the effectiveness of these traditions from a cultural, socioeconomic, or religion-of-origin lens in order to determine how these factors might influence their effectiveness in daily life. As we could present but a taste of what the world's religions and spiritual

traditions have to offer in regard to psychological well-being, future volumes may wish to examine traditions not discussed in this book (e.g., Sikhism, Jainism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shamanism, Paganism).

It is our hope that this book will serve as an enlightening and thought-provoking guide to those searching for a more thoughtful, mindful, spiritual, and contemplative path to healing, stress relief, and overall well-being, perhaps for themselves and for others with whom they live and work. We hope that this book has brought forth a way for individuals to experience the fruit of the spirit or provided some insight into how their traditions enhance well-being broadly defined. The fruit of the spirit perhaps leads to a better quality of life when considered and used thoughtfully and sincerely.

Notes

1. Plante, T. G., & Thoresen, C. E. (Eds.). (2007). *Spirit, science and health: How the spiritual mind fuels physical wellness*. Westport, CT: Praeger/Greenwood.
2. Plante, T. G., & Sherman, A. S. (Eds.). (2001). *Faith and health: Psychological perspectives*. New York: Guilford.
3. Plante, T. G. (Ed.). (2010). *Contemplative practices in action: Spirituality, meditation, and health*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger/ABC-CLIO.