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The Individual Domain of Christian Flourishing: Conceptual Foundations and Measurement Template

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This paper presents an emic approach to the science of Christian flourishing, focusing on the individual domain as a foundational element for broader congregational and community well-being. While VanderWeele's universal etic approach to human flourishing, involving six domains, provides valuable insights, it may not fully capture the nuances of flourishing within Christian contexts. Christian flourishing can be conceptualized through three interconnected domains: individual Christians, their congregations, and the communities they influence. The rationale for adopting an emic approach lies in the recognition that flourishing is a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good, including the contexts in which they live. Religious communities, as a significant context for human existence, serve as both a setting and a pathway for flourishing. Given that Christianity represents the largest religious group globally, focusing on the Christian context offers a critical lens for understanding how faith communities contribute to human flourishing. Therefore, we introduce a new construct and corresponding measure—the Christian Flourishing Index—that reflects individual flourishing in alignment with the values of the Christian "abundant life," the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, communion with God, and a stewardship approach to material resources. While the conceptual framing and measurement template of the individual Christian flourishing broadly aligns within the original dimensions of VanderWeele, the proposed dimensions might be better framed as—contentment, health, meaning, character, relationships, and stewardship—reflecting the transformative influence of the Christian faith to anchor temporal conceptions of the good life to that which is pointed towards eternal ends in God. Although this paper centers on the individual domain, we invite further scholarly engagement on other domains (e.g., congregational, community) of flourishing within the Christian context.

Interest in studying human well-being has surged in recent years across psychology and the social sciences (Rasmussen, 1999; Seligman, 2011). This interest stems from the potential to identify factors that enhance well-being and apply them across different contexts and communities (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). A notable approach (e.g., VanderWeele, 2017) outlines six temporal dimensions of flourishing—happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, purpose and meaning, character and virtue, close social relationships, and financial and material stability—intersecting with work, education, family life, and religious communities. This model has been extensively used to guide research (e.g., The Global Flourishing Study; VanderWeele et al., (in press)), and inform interventions aimed at supporting well-being (Węziak-Białowolska et al., 2019; VanderWeele, 2022).

Despite its broad applicability, VanderWeele's universal etic approach may not fully capture the complex nature of flourishing within specif-

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ic cultural and religious contexts, and, indeed, he himself has called for supplementation with tradition-specific understandings of spiritual well-being in such contexts (VanderWeele, 2024; VanderWeele et al., 2021). Human flourishing, defined as "a relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good, including the context in which that person lives" (VanderWeele et al., 2023, p.3), highlights the importance of the individual context in shaping well-being. A contextual approach to studying flourishing recognizes that well-being depends on the conditions in which people live. For example, flourishing is not a Christian term until it is lived out in a Christian faith context. In the Christian faith, flourishing is understood in relation to a life oriented toward God, community, and character (Pennington, 2017; Volf & Croasmun, 2019). In this Christian context, flourishing is not the absence of illness or suffering but a value orientation to experience "shalom" (i.e., peace, righteousness, holiness) through the connection with and discovering of God, often in the context of adversity, ultimately leading to the transformation (not replacement) of the "body" in the present into a "glorious body" in the life to come (Philippians 3:20-21). The Christian tradition values the spiritual transformation of the believer through a life lived out in love, that pursues truth and justice, and where one loves both one's neighbor and enemy, all of which is nurtured within a communal and spiritual context of the Church. Therefore, studying Christian flourishing requires attention to the contexts that shape believers' well-being, as flourishing extends beyond individual attainment to include congregational, community, and biblical dimensions (Counted, 2025a; Long, Counted, et al., 2024); VanderWeele et al., 2021). For Christians, who represent nearly a third of the global population (World Population Review, 2023), this context of a flourishing life is largely informed by their faith.

Christians often interpret a flourishing life through an abundant life perspective described in John 10:10, where Jesus tells his disciples that he has come so that they may have life and have it to the full. In other New Testament texts, Christians are also reminded that following Christ is a costly endeavor that may often involve the experience of suffering (see 1 Peter 4; 2 Corinthins 4; Philippians 3). The paradox of the Christian life—living in the abundance of Christ even amidst the experience of suffering and hardship—is often difficult to grasp. And yet, we see how such things are possible through spiritual richness born out of a deep faith (Hebrews 11:1), an enduring love (1 Corinthians 13:7), and an audacious hope (Romans 5:3-5), even amidst material and spiritual scarcity. While socio-political and economic conditions—such as freedom, persecution, prosperity, or hardship—may shape how Christians experience flourishing (see Margolis et al., 2021; Messer, 2021), there are often other dynamics at play within the Christian life that may help contextualize how Christians experience flourishing in the present. For example, during times of persecution, underground churches have often strengthened faith through shared suffering, encouraged hope by focusing on God's eternal promises, and cultivated love through acts of sacrificial care within the community (Halik, 2019). In more prosperous contexts, churches may nurture flourishing by equipping believers to steward their resources for the benefit of others, sustaining faith, hope, and love through service and generosity. Through spiritual formation practices, such as prayer, worship, and mutual support, the Church also becomes a source of encouragement, enabling believers to flourish even amidst life's challenges (Witvliet et al., 2022, 2023). Unlike secular models, Christian flourishing embraces suffering and redemptive hope, revealing how faith sustains believers through adversity (Cowden et al., 2022; Kent et al., 2022). The abundant life perspective offers a unique framework for understanding flourishing in a Christian context while also integrating several important dimensions of spiritual well-being (see Figure 1). Yet, the Christian context remains largely underexplored in the flourishing science literature, creating a gap that this paper seeks to address by exploring what flourishing look like within the individual domain of Christian life and how it can be conceptualized and measured as a social scientific construct that aligns with Christian values, spiritual strengths, and spiritual richness of the Christian faith.

As a basic foundation, this paper intersects positive psychology and Christian theology, offering a distinctively emic social scientific framework through which to examine human

flourishing. This framework can help to better understand how Christians experience and pursue flourishing, infusing dimensions such as joy, health, meaning, character, relationships, and stewardship with a distinctly Christian ethos. Recognizing that no social science research is value- or worldview-neutral (Slife et al., 2017), this framework embraces a distinctly Christian biblical vision that reflects specific beliefs and values about human nature and ultimate purpose (Christopher, 1999). This emic approach is worthwhile because it complements the etic perspective on human flourishing (e.g., VanderWeele, 2017), which focuses on universal, temporal dimensions of well-being. While etic frameworks provide valuable insights into shared aspects of flourishing across cultures (VanderWeele et al., in press), they often overlook the unique spiritual and communal dimensions that shape flourishing within specific religious contexts. As we ground the construct of Christian flourishing in the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13), this paper highlights the dynamism of different Christian dimensions that define the individual domain of Christian flourishing. This focus not only enriches the understanding of flourishing within the Christian context but also bridges the gap between universal etic frameworks and the specificities of Christian spirituality. While recognizing the three interconnected domains of Christian flourishing—individual Christians, congregations, and communities (Counted, 2025a; Long, Counted, et al., 2024)—this paper will focus on the individual domain. The focus on individual Christian flourishing provides both the social scientific and domain-specific understandings that advance both scholarly discussions and practical efforts to support, sustain, and strengthen well-being within Christian contexts. It also addresses the broader need for an emic-oriented cultural and contextual specificity in flourishing research and may serve as a model for other faith traditions to explore similar emic approaches.

Contextualizing the Individual Domain of Christian Flourishing

Flourishing is "the relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good, including the contexts in which that person lives" (VanderWeele et al., 2023, p.3). This definition highlights the importance of context in shaping flourishing, distinguishing it from well-being, which focuses more narrowly on the individual's internal state (Diener et al., 2018; White, 2017). For Christians, flourishing is contextual, shaped by their faith in Christ, their participation in congregational life, and their engagement with the wider community. In other words, flourishing includes not just personal experiences of well-being but also the context in which an individual is embedded, such as congregations, religious teachings, and broader communal structures (Counted, 2025a; Long, Counted, et al., 2024). This context begins with an open invitation to a relationship with Jesus Christ and the abundant life He offers (John 10:10)—a life marked by spiritual richness that is accessible to all, regardless of circumstances, even in the midst of scarcity (see Figure 1). Therefore, Christian flourishing must be understood within the theological, moral, cultural, and social frameworks that shape Christian identity and lived experience.

VanderWeele (2017) provided a valuable foundation for understanding temporal flourishing through dimensions such as happiness and life satisfaction, physical and mental health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, close social relationships, and financial and material

Figure 1

The Invitation to the Abundant Life Starts with a Relationship with Jesus Christ

stability, given that they are universally desired and an end in themselves. However, the etic nature of these dimensions means that they may not fully capture the dimensions that define flourishing within Christian contexts. Christian flourishing must incorporate emic dimensions that reflect the distinct ways in which the Christian faith shapes a believer's pursuit of a flourishing life within their respective context. Christian flourishing, therefore, cannot be assessed in purely etic terms but must also include how individuals experience purpose, virtue, and fulfillment within the broader Christian faith tradition (Geertz, 1973; King & Boyatzis, 2004).

Contrasting Christian Flourishing with Temporal Flourishing

In many secular frameworks, happiness and life satisfaction are defined through hedonic well-being—the presence of positive emotions and the absence of suffering (Diener et al., 2018). However, for Christians, these temporal emotions are often secondary to the enduring states of joy/peace, which is rooted in a relationship with God (Emmons, 2020; Xi et al., 2021). For example, joy is not dependent on external circumstances (Emmons, 2020; Philippians 4:4) but is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Peace transcends worldly understanding (Philippians 4:7), reflecting a spiritual resilience that sustains believers even in adversity (Xi et al., 2021). When a believer embraces contentment, they relinquish striving for more and rest in God's sufficiency, which creates the conditions for joy and peace to flourish (Philippians 4:11-13; Hebrews 13:5). These Christian characteristics honor the context of faith, where flourishing is not merely about feeling "happy or satisfied" but about experiencing God's presence and promises (Xi et al., 2021), which suggest that alongside these dimensions of flourishing, Christian should also consider aspects of joy and peace as markers that reflect a deep-seated sense of contentment that transcends circumstances (Cowden et al., 2022; Kent et al., 2022).

VanderWeele's (2017) framework includes mental and physical health as essential components of flourishing. While Christians are, likewise, called to care for the mind and body, they are also called to pursue these aims through the lens of stewardship. The body is seen as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), and caring for it is an act of worship and responsibility. VanderWeele's model, like most etic approaches, does not explore the reasons one may seek mental or physical health but treats health as its own end (VanderWeele, 2017), as an instrumental good (Steptoe et al., 2015) and an intrinsic good (VanderWeele, 2024). Religious coping mechanisms, communal prayer, and trust in divine providence shape how Christians interpret and navigate illness and suffering (Kent et al., 2022). While good health is valued and should be pursued, for Christians, it is not an ultimate determinant of flourishing. At various times in a Christian's life, faith may help a person navigate or even transform the experience of physical suffering into an opportunity for spiritual growth (Cowden et al., 2022).

In secular well-being models, meaning and purpose are often indexed as various aspects of career achievement, personal goals, and social contributions (Steger et al., 2009). However, for Christians, purpose is not primarily self-defined but is rooted in God's will and work in the world (Counted et al., 2024; King & Boyatzis, 2004). Believers find meaning in their identity as children of God and their participation in His redemptive work (Ephesians 2:10). Christian meaning is often collective rather than purely individualistic, focusing on service, worship, and the fulfillment of God's will rather than personal ambitions alone (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This is particularly striking amidst broader cultural distinctions, wherein Western well-being models often prioritize autonomy, while Christian meaning-making often emphasizes relational dependence on God and community (Christopher, 1999). The spiritual dimension of purpose transcends individual aspirations, connecting personal flourishing to a larger, eternal narrative (King & Boyatzis, 2004).

One of the most striking features of VanderWeele's temporal flourishing model is the inclusion of character and virtue, the internal formation of the human person. While these are, indeed, values that many Christian would endorse as important, in their global application, the particular character or virtue traits of focus are those that have broad resonance across traditions and ethical frameworks (e.g., kindness, promoting the good, forgoing immediate gratification; Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). Christian character is more fundamentally shaped

by theological virtues and spiritual formation within the faith community. For Christians, character is not merely about moral excellence but about Christlike transformation. The goal is to reflect the image of Christ (Romans 8:29), embodying virtues such as sacrificial love for the sake of others, other-oriented humility, and forgiveness to account for human fallenness. This process of spiritual formation is central to Christian flourishing, as it shapes how individuals relate to God, others, and the world. Thus, the development of Christian character is not just an ethical pursuit, but a lifelong spiritual transformation, often cultivated through sacramental participation, scriptural engagement, and communal practices (Miller, 2006). Compared to secular moral development, which often emphasizes individual rationality, the Christian virtue is embedded in communal narratives, liturgical traditions, and embodied spiritual practices (Geertz, 1973; Smith, 2016).

VanderWeele's framework prioritizes close relationships as an important social determinant of well-being, with emphasis on strong family and friendship networks (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2017). In addition to kinship relationships, Christians also experience relationships within the context of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) and the world (John 3:16). Fellowship is not limited to personal connections but extends to the communal life of the church, where believers are united by their shared faith and mission (Lim & Putnam, 2010). This communal dimension of relationships reflects the Christian value of unity and mutual edification. Christian relationships are often covenantal rather than transactional, rooted in spiritual kinship (e.g., agape love) and communal worship rather than merely emotional or instrumental support (Triandis, 2018). Unlike secular friendship models that prioritize reciprocity and personal benefit, Christian relationships are ideally shaped by commitments to grace, sacrifice, and unconditional love (King & Boyatzis, 2004).

Finally, while financial and material stability are important components of secure flourishing, this dimension has nuance within the Christian tradition. For Christians, financial well-being is framed as stewardship and generosity (Briggs & Reiss, 2021; Francis, 2015; McFague, 2008). Resources are seen as gifts from God to be managed wisely and shared generously (2 Corinthians 9:6-8). This perspective shifts the focus from accumulation to contribution, in such a way that aligns financial practices with the values of the Kingdom.

Spiritual Strengths and Pillars of Christian Flourishing

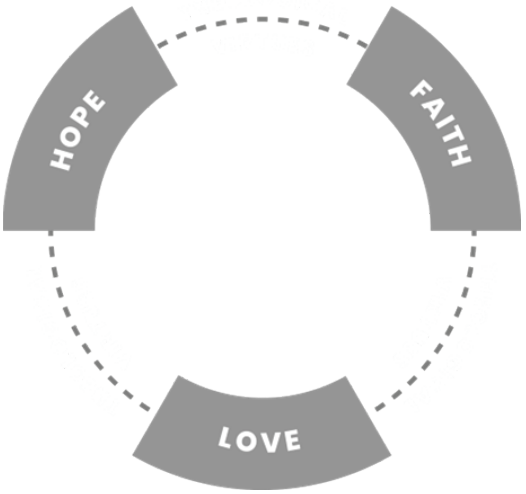
The concept of the abundant life in John 10:10 is central to the Christian understanding of flourishing. Jesus declared, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (*New International Version*, 1978/2011, John 10:10). This "fullness of life" is not merely about material prosperity or temporal happiness but includes a holistic state of well-being that integrates all dimensions. The abundant life reflects Christ's vision for full human flourishing, where individuals experience deep communion with God, meaningful relationships with others, and purposeful engagement with the world.

It is important to remember the socio-historical context of Jesus' words in John 10:10, which was proclaimed within a society burdened by religious, political, and socio-economic divisions. Many of Jesus' followers were under Roman rule, living amidst religious legalism, political oppression, and socio-economic hardships (Wright, 2018). This lack of "fullness" and flourishing in their lives would have resonated with Jesus' promise of an abundant life. To fully appreciate Jesus' message, one must understand that He was not merely promising an improvement in material conditions but was offering a transformation of life in its entirety (Hays, 2013). This abundant life is not confined to the material or temporal but is holistic. At the heart of this vision are the theological virtues—faith, hope, and love—which sustain and animate the Christian life (Figure 2). These virtues, though propelled by God's Spirit in the believer and directed toward Him, influenced how believers relate to God, others, and the world. They provided the spiritual foundation for flourishing, enabling Christians to navigate the challenges of life and live fully in Christ (Long & VanderWeele, 2023; Romanus-Cessario, 2008).

The abundant life is not a fixed state but an ongoing process of spiritual transformation, made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit, whose fruit is manifested in our faith, love, and hope. These theological virtues are central to the Christian life across traditions and are essential for sustaining the Abundant

Figure 2

Theological Virtues



Life. These virtues—faith, hope, and love—are means by which believers appropriate and experience the fullness of life that Christ promises (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Faith is the virtue by which Christians believe in God and all that He has revealed. It involves trust in God's promises and a commitment to live in accordance with His will (Hebrews 11:1). Faith enables believers to see beyond temporal circumstances and embrace spiritual realities, providing a sense of security and purpose even in the midst of adversity. Empirical studies have shown that faith plays a significant role in promoting well-being. Religious faith is associated with greater resilience, lower levels of depression, and improved coping strategies in the face of stress (Koenig et al., 2012, 2023). Faith provides a framework for meaning-making, helping individuals interpret their experiences in light of God's promises and purposes (Park et al., 2025). In the context of the abundant life, faith sustains believers by anchoring them in the reality of God's love and faithfulness (Hebrews 10:23). It enables them to trust in God's provision, even when material resources are scarce, and to find joy and peace in His presence.

Hope is the virtue by which Christians desire and expect full and eternal life with God (Witvliet et al., 2022). It is rooted in the confidence of God's faithfulness and the promises of Scripture (Rueger et al., 2022; Romans 5:3-5). Hope sustains believers in times of trial, reminding them of the ultimate fulfillment of God's Kingdom. Several studies have established the strong connection between hope and well-being (Counted et al., 2022; Long, Wilkinson et al., 2024; Pleeging et al., 2021), with recent findings highlighting a strong correlation between regular religious service attendance and heightened levels of hope (Counted et al., 2024, 2025). While many positive psychologists and social scientists have developed operational measures of hope within the general population (e.g., Long, Wilkinson et al., 2024; Pleeging, 2022; Rueger et al., 2022; Snyder et al., 1991; Witvliet et al., 2022), n the Christian context, hope is not merely about achieving temporal goals powered by one's own agency, but about anticipating the fulfillment of God's promises, both in this life and the next (Romans 8:24-25). The abundant life is sustained by hope, which enables believers to persevere in the face of challenges and to live with a sense of purpose and direction. Hope transforms suffering into an opportunity for growth, and empowers us to act, while trusting in God's redemptive purposes and look forward to the ultimate restoration of all things (Romans 5:3-5).

Love is the greatest of the theological virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13), not only because it embodies selfless (agape) love for God and others—both desiring union with the beloved and contributing to their good (VanderWeele, 2023)—but also because of its eternal nature. While faith and hope are essential in this life, the Apostle Paul argued that they will become unnecessary when we see Jesus face to face; faith will give way to sight, and hope will be fulfilled (1 Corinthians 13:12). Yet love will endure forever, making it the greatest of all virtues. Love is the foundational principle of Christian life, motivating acts of worship to God because of who God is, and self-giving compassion, and service to our neighbors. Research on altruism and prosocial behavior has shown that love and compassion are associated with greater well-being and life satisfaction (Kahana et al., 2021; Wilkinson et al., in press). In the Christian context, love is not merely an emotion but a deliberate choice to seek the good of others, even at personal cost. This selfless love (with both unitive and contributive attributes) reflects the character of Christ and is a hallmark of the abundant life.

Love sustains the abundant life by sustaining meaningful relationships and creating a sense of belonging and community. It enables believers to experience the joy of giving and receiving love (Lee & Wellinghoff, 2024), both within the church and in the wider world. Love also motivates believers to engage in acts of justice and mercy, contributing to the flourishing of others and the transformation of society.

The abundant life and the theological virtues provide a rich and holistic framework for understanding the individual domain of Christian flourishing. The abundant life is sustained by the operation of faith, hope, and love in the believer's life by providing the spiritual foundation for flourishing and enabling Christians to experience the fullness of life that Christ promises. This virtuous cycle cannot only enhance the well-being of the individual Christian, but also contribute to the well-being of the broader community, as individual believers embody these virtues in action.

Conceptualizing Dimensions of Individual Domain of Christian Flourishing: A Value-Oriented Approach

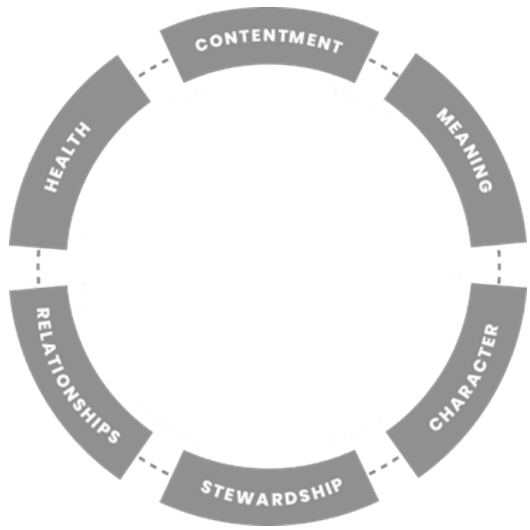
Understanding Christian flourishing at the individual level requires methodologies that reflect an emic approach that can shed light on the values and commitments of believers. Etic, secular, generic, or more universal approaches to measurement, which prioritizes standardized metrics such as happiness and life satisfaction, will, by design, miss context-sensitive and faith-centered dimensions of flourishing that are central to the Christian experience. To provide a more accurate and meaningful framework, research must also incorporate tradition-specific perspectives. For many Christian populations, this will include the values of faith, hope, love, and the pursuit of the abundant life proposed by Christ (see Figure 2). This approach ensures that the measurement of flourishing is not merely a reflection of general ideals of happiness and well-being but can be complemented by biblical and communal aspects of well-being that anchor the Christian life (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Kapic et al., 2023).

Christian flourishing is fundamentally shaped by value orientation—the priorities, beliefs, and practices that define what it means to live a good life aligned with God's purposes (Razin, 1996). For Christians, flourishing is not primarily about individual achievement or material prosperity but about living in relationship with God, embodying Christlike character, and contributing to the well-being of others. For example, while secular frameworks might measure happiness through self-reported life satisfaction, Christians often prioritize constructs like contentment from which precedes joy and peace—emotions that transcend circumstances and are rooted in a deep trust in God's promises. Where secular models might focus on financial stability as a marker of well-being, Christians view resources through the lens of stewardship and generosity, seeing them as tools for serving God and others rather than ends in themselves. These value-driven distinctions highlight the need for a contextualized framework and emic measurement tools that honor the Christian understanding of flourishing.

As we move forward, we will explore the individual domain by building on VanderWeele's dimensions that align with more distinctly Christian conceptualizations of flourishing, while integrating the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love into each aspect. This *both/and* approach (using the general measure alongside the Christian-specific measure) will allow for the assessment of flourishing, broadly defined,

Figure 3

Dimensions of the Individual Domain



as well as flourishing that is rooted in what Christians hold as essential and meaningful, offering a contextually sensitive framework for understanding well-being within Christian life.

Contentment/Happiness

While believers across denominations seek joy as a mark of spiritual well-being (Nyquist, 2018), true joy is sustained only when rooted in contentment—a settled confidence in God's provision and sufficiency, even in the midst of adversity (Philippians 4:11-13). This joy is not dependent on external circumstances but is rooted in the unchanging character of God (Psalm 16:11). Thus, contentment flows from a heart at peace with God, trusting in His providence and resting in His presence (Philippians 4:6-7). Peace, in turn, is enriched by contentment, as the assurance of God's goodness and this faithfulness brings stability to the human spirit, allowing for an enduring sense of well-being. Together, contentment, joy, and peace permeate every aspect of Christian life as ends in themselves—from work and family to education and church involvement—creating a vision of flourishing that is uniquely Christian (Lim & Putnam, 2010). Complementing the general dimension of happiness/life satisfaction (see VanderWeele, 2017), contentment is a central dimension of Christian flourishing and a spiritual posture that reflects a heart at rest, free from the anxieties of striving and comparison. However, contentment is also portrayed as a learned spiritual discipline, a state of inner stability that transcends external conditions (see Philippians 4:11-13). This stability creates the conditions for joy and peace to flourish, as the believer is no longer tossed about by the uncertainties of life but rests securely in God's providence. Within the abundant life framework, contentment is not merely a passive acceptance of one's circumstances but an active trust in God's sovereignty, made possible through one's faith in God, hope in the future, and an invitation to love one's neighbor and enemy. In other words, it is not about passive resignation but an active trust in God's promises (Hebrews 13:5), recognizing that true sufficiency is found not in material abundance but in the unchanging presence of God.

Faith Grounds Contentment in God's Sufficiency

Contentment arises from the virtue of faith, which anchors believers in the assurance of God's presence and provision. Hebrews 11:1 defined faith as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Hebrews 11:1). This assurance allows believers to rest in God's provision, even when circumstances are uncertain. Unlike hedonic forms of happiness, which often depend on external circumstances, Christian contentment is a deep-seated trust that God's grace is sufficient in every situation (2 Corinthians 12:9). This confidence produces joy—not as a fleeting emotion but as an enduring response to God's enduring faithfulness. Faith shifts the focus from what is lacking to what is already given—the abundant grace and love of God (John 10:10). As faith grows, so does the believer's capacity for contentment, even in adversity, which in turn nurtures joy and peace.

Hope Sustains Contentment in Trials

The virtue of hope sustains contentment, particularly in times of suffering and uncertainty. Hope looks beyond present difficulties and directs the believer's gaze toward the future fulfillment of God's promises and the ultimate restoration of all things. Romans 8:24-25 noted, "For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Romans 8:24–25). This forward-looking perspective allows believers to remain content, knowing that their present, even profound, struggles, cannot undermine their eternal security in Christ (Romans 8:18). Hope not only preserves joy in trials but also reinforces peace, as it reassures believers of God's sovereign care, even in life's most challenging moments (Romans 8:28). A Christian who embraces hope finds contentment "in the waiting," knowing that God's purposes will unfold in His perfect timing.

Love as the Expression of Shared Contentment

Contentment is expressed and sustained through the virtue of love, particularly within Christian community (see 1 John 4:16). In close-knit agapic relationships characterized by mutual care and self-giving love, believers experience the richness of contentment—a satisfaction that comes not from possessions or achievements but from belonging to the body of Christ (Acts 2:46-47). Love amplifies joy through acts of generosity, kindness, and service, while

also nurturing peace by fostering reconciliation and unity within the body (Colossians 3:14-15). Contentment in Christ is never a solitary pursuit; it is cultivated and multiplied within a community of God's people reflecting and modeling the love of God. That reflects God's love.

Health

Within the abundant life framework, health is understood as a holistic integration of mental, physical, and spiritual well-being, which points to the multidimensional nature of the Christian life as a psychosomatic unity (Böttigheimer & Kamp, 2024; Hoekema, 1986; 1 Corinthians 15:44). Theologically, psychosomatic unity reflects the biblical understanding that humans are created as whole beings, where the body (soma), soul (psyche), and spirit are interconnected and inseparable in their flourishing (VanderWeele, 2024). This concept emphasizes that care for the physical body, emotional well-being, and spiritual life cannot be compartmentalized, as each dimension affects the others. Christian health is perceived as an engagement between the vertical dimension (relationship with God) and the horizontal dimension (relationships with others and the material world), with Christ at the center. Health is universally desired across Christian denominations, as it reflects the biblical vision of shalom—a state of wholeness, harmony, and flourishing (Jeremiah 33:6). While specific practices and emphases may vary among traditions, the pursuit of health as a component of Christian flourishing is a shared goal. Health is not merely a means to an end but is also an end in itself, as it reflects the goodness of God's creation and the believer's participation in His redemptive work. When Christians care for their bodies, minds, and spirits, they bear witness to the transformative power of the gospel and the hope of resurrection (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Rooted in the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, health is a tangible expression of a life lived in alignment with God's purposes.

Faith as the Foundation of Holistic Health

Faith is the cornerstone of good health within the Christian framework and shapes how believers understand and care for their bodies, minds, and spirits. The vertical dimension of health—the relationship with God—is nourished through foundational spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and scripture study. These practices have been shown to positively influence mental health, reducing stress, anxiety, and depression while enhancing well-being and life satisfaction (Bradshaw et al., 2024; Laird et al., 2004; Oman, 2018). Faith also supports resilience, providing believers with the mental fortitude and trust in God's providence, even in the face of adversity (Park, 2005). By viewing the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), faith encourages stewardship of physical health through healthy lifestyle choices, such as regular exercise, balanced nutrition, and sufficient rest (Koenig & Cohen, 2002; Pargament et al., 2005). This holistic approach to health reflects the Christian belief that caring for oneself is an act of worship and gratitude to God.

Hope Sustains Health Through Challenges

The virtue of hope plays an important role in sustaining health, particularly during times of physical or mental struggle (Counted et al., 2022). In the Christian context, hope looks forward to the ultimate restoration of all things, including the healing and wholeness promised in God's redemptive plan. This forward-looking perspective provides believers with the strength to endure illness, pain, or emotional distress, knowing that their present suffering is temporary and that God is actively working for their good (Romans 8:28). Hope also encourages proactive engagement with mental and physical health care, recognizing that seeking professional help is not a sign of weak faith but an expression of trust in God's provision of resources and wisdom (Aten et al., 2011; Counted, 2025b).

Love as the Social Expression of Health

Love is the driving force behind the social (e.g., communal, relational) aspects of health within the abundant life framework. The horizontal dimension of health—relationships with others—is nurtured through the love and support of Christian communities. Robust social connections provide emotional, practical, and spiritual support, which are essential for both mental and physical well-being (Hill et al., 2006; Krause, 2008). Acts of love, such as serving others, offering forgiveness, and fostering reconciliation, contribute to a sense of belonging and purpose, which are critical for mental health. Love also motivates believers to care for their bodies as an expression of gratitude for God's

gift of life and as a means of serving others effectively. The Christian emphasis on moderation, self-discipline, and respect for the body (1 Corinthians 9:25-27; Philippians 4:5) reflects a love-driven commitment to holistic health. Health and the body itself are an important means to love others (John Paul II, 2006).

Meaning

Central to the abundant life framework is the cultivation of a profound sense of meaning that is deeply grounded in one's relationship with God and in alignment with God's purpose (Park, 2005; Park et al., 2025). The pursuit of meaning and purpose is a universal human longing (VanderWeele, 2017), and within the Christian context, it takes on a distinctive character: Christians find ultimate meaning not in personal achievement or societal approval but in their identity as beloved children of God and participants in His redemptive work. This perspective transcends denominational differences, uniting believers in a shared vision of life centered in Christ. Meaning and purpose are, therefore, not merely individual pursuits but are cultivated within the community of faith, where relationships, service, and worship intertwine to create a holistic experience of flourishing. This dimension of flourishing can be understood within the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, which together shape how Christians understand their lives as part of God's greater story (Counted et al., 2024).

Faith Grounds Meaning in God's Eternal Plan

Faith provides the foundation for a Christian's sense of meaning and purpose. It anchors believers in the assurance that their lives are part of God's redemptive plan, even when circumstances are unclear or challenging. This eternal perspective (Alcorn, 1999) shifts the focus beyond temporary achievements to lasting significance, while emphasizing that true purpose is found in alignment with God's will. Faith enables believers to see their unique gifts and talents as divine endowments meant to be used for His glory and the good of others (1 Peter 4:10). Whether through education, work, family, or church involvement, faith transforms ordinary activities into meaningful expressions of worship and service.

Hope Sustains Purpose Through Life's Struggles

The Christian understanding of hope is not wishful pollyannaish thinking but a fixed attention to God's promises and ultimate restoration, particularly in the midst of hardship and struggles. This hope sustains believers as they navigate the challenges of life, reminding themselves that their efforts—no matter how small—contribute to God's greater plan (Romans 8:28). Hope also inspires a forward-looking vision, encouraging Christians to engage in purposeful work and redemptive work in the world today. Even in difficult seasons, hope assures believers that their lives have meaning because they are part of a story much larger than themselves.

Purpose is Expressed Through Loving Service and Relationships

Love compels believers to use their gifts and talents in service to others. This function reflects the self-giving love of Christ. Within the Christian life, purpose is not to be self-centered but others-oriented, flowing from the "horizontal" dimension of relationships with others and the world. Meaningful work, for example, becomes a calling when it is motivated by love and aligned with one's faith and values (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Active participation in church communities and nurturing family relationships are expressions of love that also foster a deep sense of belonging and purpose (Lim & Putnam, 2010; Mahoney, 2010). Love transforms everyday actions into opportunities to glorify God and bless others, imbuing life with profound significance.

Character

The development of character and virtue is central to Christian flourishing (VanderWeel et al., 2021). The cultivation of virtue is an aspiration across religious traditions, but within the Christian context, it takes on a distinctive character. Christian virtues are not merely about personal improvement but are expressions of a life transformed by the gospel. Virtues such as love, kindness, patience, and self-control (or the fruit of the Spirit; Galatians 5:22-23) are not abstract ideals but lived realities that emerge from a life empowered by the Holy Spirit and expressed through relationships, work, and service (Counted et al., in press). These virtues are cultivated within the multidimensional conditions of the Christian life—relationship with God, relationships with others, and engagement with the world—and are nurtured through various pathways of flourishing, including education,

work, family, and church communities. Christian virtues reflect the character of Christ and contribute to the common good, enabling flourishing not only for individuals but also for their communities. Virtues like agape love—selfless, sacrificial love for others—are central to the Christian vision of flourishing, as they embody the heart of the gospel and its call to serve others (Lewis, 2001; 1 John 4:7-8).

Faith as the Foundation of Godly Character

Faith serves as the foundation for the cultivation of Christian character and virtues. It is through faith that believers are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, which enables them to embody the character of Christ. Spiritual habits such as prayer, Scripture reading, and communal worship provide opportunities for reflection, moral development, and spiritual formation (Park, 2005). These practices strengthen believers' relationship with God, grounding their character in His truth and grace. Faith also inspires a commitment to ethical behavior and moral integrity, as believers seek to honor God in every aspect of their lives.

Hope Sustains Character Through Challenges

Hope sustains the pursuit of character and virtue, particularly in the face of adversity or temptation. The Christian virtue of hope is rooted in the assurance of God's promises and the ultimate fulfillment of His kingdom. This eternal perspective enables believers to practice delayed gratification, prioritizing spiritual growth and eternal rewards over immediate pleasures (Hebrews 12:1-2; Ortberg, 2015). Hope also fosters resilience, empowering believers to persevere in living out virtues like patience and self-control, even when it is difficult. By fixing their eyes on Christ (Hebrews 12:2), believers are motivated to cultivate character that reflects His likeness.

Love and the Expression of Virtue in Community

Love is the highest virtue and the driving force behind all others (1 Corinthians 13:13). For Christians, love prompts a desire to be united to God and others and to contribute to God's work in the world as an outpouring of that love. The love of God leads us to pray for God's work in the world as an outpouring of that love. The love of God leads us to pray for God's work to be done in the world and to invite God's work in our own character to shape it to be ever more like Christ. In this way, Christians invite the Holy Spirit to cultivate many virtues, including the infamous list sent to the Christians in ancient Galatia (Galatians 5:22-23): love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These virtues are most often made manifest in community—for it is in community that Christian virtues are tested, practiced, and perfected. Aquinas (1274/1948) understood the theological virtue of love as the form of all the virtues and that by which the other virtues were themselves perfected.

Relationships

At the heart of Christian flourishing is the recognition that flourishing is relational. For Christians, relationships reflect the gospel's call to love one another as Christ has loved us (John 13:34), creating communities where individuals can experience the fullness of life promised in Him. Across Christian denominations, healthy relationships with others are recognized as a key component of the spiritual life and the flourishing of both individuals and communities (VanderWeele et al., 2021).

Relationships Grounded by Faith

Faith serves as the foundation for discipling relationships, anchored in a shared commitment to Christ and His mission. Within Christian communities, faith is nurtured through shared practices (e.g., worship, prayer, the sacraments, Bible studies, support groups), which create spaces for spiritual growth and mutual encouragement (Lim & Putnam, 2010). These practices not only strengthen individuals' relationship with God but also strengthen their bonds with one another. Faith also inspires believers to invest in the spiritual journeys of one another, offering guidance, accountability, and support as they seek to live out their calling.

Hope Sustains Relationships

The Christian virtue of hope assures believers that their efforts to build and maintain relationships are part of God's redemptive plan. Christian hope expands far beyond our own future joy in God to include the redemption of others and the restoration of the world. Hope, in the Christian context, motivates communal participation marked by authentic relationships with others—in our own homes, in our congregations, and in our communities (Wright, 2018).

Love is at the Heart of Relationships

Love is the defining feature of Christian relationships. Christians are called to not only love their neighbors, but to love our enemies and pray for those who cause us harm (Matthew 5:44). Christians are also called to love one another (John 13:34-35). Whether in ministry groups, workplaces, or families, love motivates believers to prioritize the well-being of others, creating environments where individuals can thrive (Post, 2003). In families, for example, love is expressed through nurturing relationships, shared religious practices, and the cultivation of a faith-filled home environment (Mahoney, 2010). In church communities, love is demonstrated through acts of service, forgiveness and reconciliation, mentorship or discipleship, and mutual care, which reinforce the bonds of fellowship and contribute to the flourishing of the broader community of believers (Krause, 2008).

Stewardship/Financial

Stewardship reflects the Christian belief that all resources—time, talents, material possessions, and our bodies—are entrusted to individuals by God and are to be managed responsibly for His glory and the good of others. The practice of stewardship is valued across Christian traditions, as it reflects a shared commitment to honor God with one's resources. While specific practices may vary, the underlying principles of generosity, honor, and gratitude to God are central to the Christian vision of flourishing with regard to material resources (2 Corinthians 9:11). However, stewardship extends beyond financial management and includes the responsible use and appreciation of talents (1 Peter 4:10; Matthew 25:14-30), resources (Proverbs 3:9; Luke 16:10-11), time (Ephesians 5:15-16; Psalm 90:12), relationships (Romans 12:10), the environment (Genesis 2:15; Psalm 24:1), and one's health (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Philippians 4:6-7). Faithfulness in these areas contributes to experiencing divine provision, including financial stability or material security which is an important dimension of temporal flourishing (VanderWeele, 2017). Stewardship, therefore, transcends cultural and denominational boundaries and unites believers in a common commitment to use their resources for God's glory and the good of others.

Faith as Trusting in God's Ultimate Provision

Faith is the foundation of stewardship, shaping how Christians view and manage their resources. It begins with the recognition that everything belongs to God and is given as a trust (Psalm 24:1). This perspective shifts the focus from personal accumulation to responsible management, as stewards seek to honor God with what they have been given. Faith also fosters trust in God's provision, freeing individuals from anxiety over material needs (Matthew 6:25-34). By trusting in God's faithfulness, believers are empowered to use their resources generously and wisely, reflecting their dependence on Him and their commitment to His kingdom.

Christian Hope as Investing in Eternal Treasures

Hope infuses stewardship with an eternal perspective, reminding believers that their actions have lasting significance. The Christian virtue of hope looks beyond temporary material gains or losses to the eternal rewards of investing in God's kingdom (Matthew 6:19-21). This hope motivates Christians to prioritize generosity, service, and the good of others over personal prosperity. Whether through tithing, charitable giving, or voluntary service, hope inspires individuals to use their resources in ways that reflect God's redemptive purposes. By focusing on eternal treasures, stewardship becomes an expression of hope, demonstrating a confident expectation in God's promises and the ultimate fulfillment of His plan.

Loving and Serving Generously

Love is the driving force behind stewardship, compelling believers to use their resources for the benefit of others. For Christians, stewardship is not only about responsible management but about expressing Christlike love through acts of generosity and service. Love transforms stewardship into a tangible expression of care for others, whether through sharing knowledge, offering time, or providing financial support. In education, a Christian teacher might generously invest in their students' growth. In the workplace, a believer might use their skills to improve their community. And in families, stewardship is expressed through cultivating gratitude, contentment, and a spirit of sharing (Francis, 2016). Love also extends to the broader church community, where acts of service and charitable giving strengthen relationships and contribute to the collective flourishing of the body of Christ (1 Peter 4:10).

Development and Measurement Template of the Individual Domain of Christian Flourishing

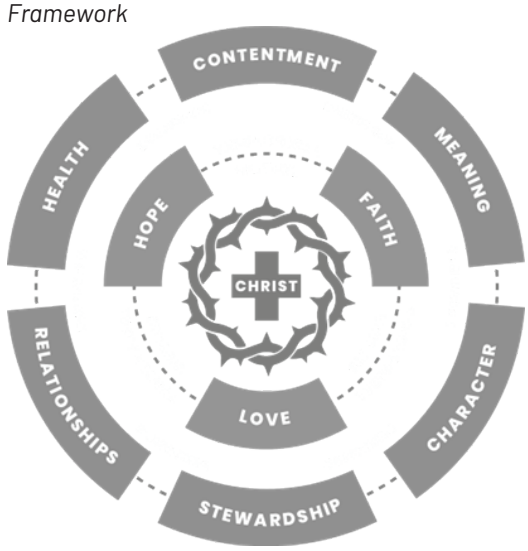
While VanderWeele's (2017) temporal flourishing measure provides a valuable etic and intentionally broad perspective on well-being, it does not, by design, fully capture a distinctively Christian understanding of flourishing, which is rooted in a relationship with Christ and shaped by the teachings of Scripture. For example, the Christian experience of contentment transcends hedonic forms of happiness, as it is grounded in the assurance of God's love and the hope of a better future. The concept of stewardship reframes material well-being, pointing to responsible resource management and generosity rather than personal accumulation of material wealth.

Unlike temporal measures of human flourishing (e.g., Butler & Kern, 2016; Diener et al., 2010; Janicke-Bowles et al., 2023; Keyes et al., 2008; Rautenbach & Rothmann, 2017; VanderWeele, 2017), the proposed measurement template builds on the six domains of VanderWeele to capture individual dimensions of flourishing in ways that align with the Christian tradition. First, it positions the relationship with Jesus Christ at the center of a flourishing Christian life—a connection from which spiritual richness is assured. Second, it integrates the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, ensuring the measure reflects core Christian values and practices that are broadly shared across Christian traditions, including Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions (Aquinas, 1274/1948; John Paul II, 1984). We focused faith, hope, and love as pillars of Christian flourishing (see Figure 1), tailoring the measure to reflect the theological and cultural nuances of the Christian faith. For example, faith anchors flourishing in a relationship with God, grounding well-being in His presence and promises, and transforming how individuals view resources, relationships, and challenges. Hope infuses flourishing with an eternal perspective, enabling endurance through suffering and inspiring generosity, resilience, and a commitment to God's kingdom. Theologically, love is the foundation of the virtues and of Christian flourishing more broadly, grounding Christian identity in the love of God and others. This grounding flows into all aspects of life, including how we love and care for our families, our churches, our neighbors, our communities, and, importantly, even our enemies. This love reflects Christ's self-giving love and fostering interconnectedness and mutual care. These virtues are not abstract ideals but lived realities that permeate every dimension of the Christian life. Third, the template employs Christian-oriented language, using terms like "contentment" and "stewardship" to reflect the distinctively Christian understanding of well-being (VanderWeele et al., 2021; John 10:10). However, our framing of contentment may be analogous to Aquinas' conception of happiness, which he defines as the ultimate end of human life (beatitudo), achieved not through temporal goods but in the perfect fulfillment found in the beatific vision of God (Aquinas, 1274/1948). Just as Aquinas distinguished between imperfect happiness—found in worldly success—and perfect happiness—found only in God—contentment can be understood as a foretaste of this ultimate fulfillment, allowing one to experience peace amid life's uncertainties by resting in divine sufficiency.

Fourth, the measurement template adopts a holistic perspective, addressing spiritual formation, relational aspects of Christian well-being, and responsible resource management, which are central to the Abundant Life (see Figure 4). Finally, it demonstrates contextual sensitivity by respecting the diversity of Christian traditions while providing a unified framework

Figure 4

Individual Domain of Christian Flourishing Framework



for understanding flourishing. This approach ensures the measure resonates with Christian communities, offering a tool that is both biblically grounded and scientifically relevant. This approach is anchored in the abundant life, which positions flourishing as a holistic integration of spiritual, relational, and material dimensions, all centered in Christ.

The process of developing and refining the proposed measure benefited from the critical feedback of an interdisciplinary and ecumenical team of scholars for over two years. The team carefully selected and evaluated six dimensions of the individual domain of Christian flourishing, based on historic Christian documents (e.g., Aquinas, 1274/1948; John Paul II, 1984; Westminster 1647/2014), spiritual practices, and service traditions, coupled with an important assessment of theological virtues (Aquinas, 1274/1948; Long & VanderWeele, 2023; Pieper, 2011; Romanus-Cessario, 2008), as well as comparisons to existing Christian-specific measures of well-being (e.g., VanderWeele et al., 2021). In the last two years, the measure benefited from several rounds of feedback and roundtable discussions from various theologians, pastors, scientists, and scholars from various Christian traditions. The measure was refined through multiple rounds of revisions, with careful attention to denominational nuances and theological diversity. While the goal was to create an emic measure broadly applicable across Christian traditions, we recognized that certain items might require adaptation for specific contexts.

The effort to develop a universally applicable measure of flourishing that could be applicable across Christian traditions posed challenges to the group. The authors respectfully navigated this process through healthy discussions, deliberations, roundtables, and compromises; ultimately avoiding wordings that elicited persistent confusion. Despite these efforts, we recognize that the measure might not be appropriate in certain denominational contexts, and that some items may not be seen as part of flourishing in every group that self-identifies as Christian. However, given the extraordinary diversity within Christianity and the denominational diversity of the authors, the proposed measure should be useful and suitable for a substantial portion of those who identify with the Christian faith. Modifications can be made to make the measure more relevant to specific settings.

We propose a new set of items that complement VanderWeele's (2017) temporal flourishing measure while taking a distinctively emic approach. These items are designed to reflect the unique values, theology, and traditions of the Christian faith. Unlike generic measures, these items are rooted in the multidimensional conditions of the Christian life—relationship with God, relationships with others, and engagement with the material world—and are infused with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. The proposed measure consists of 12 items, two for each of the six domains: contentment, health, meaning, character, relationships, and stewardship. Each item is scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Never true of me*; 5 = *Always true of me*), allowing participants to reflect on their subjective Christian experience. This approach is supported by research on memory and decision-making, which suggests that individuals rely on vivid, subjective memories when evaluating their experiences (Fandakova et al., 2021). Below is a summary of the items and instructions on how they might be scored, with specific anchors (see Table 1).

The items can of course also be classified in other ways as well. Items 2b, 3a and 3b might be combined as an assessment of faith; items 1b, 4a, and 4b as an assessment of hope; items 1a, 5a, and 5b as an assessment of love. Or alternatively, in the domains of Christian spiritual well-being earlier put forward by VanderWeele et al. (2021): 1a and 2b as communion; 2a and 6b as practices; 3a and 3b as beliefs; 1b and 4b as character; 5a and 5b as relationships; and 6a and 4a as service.

Discussion and Research Agenda: Advancing the Science of Christian Flourishing

The pursuit of an abundant life offers a transformative vision of human flourishing that transcends secular and temporal interpretations of well-being. Christian individuals who immerse themselves in this pursuit not only nurture their personal growth but also become catalysts for positive change within their congregations and communities. Christian flourishing unfolds across three interconnected domains: the individual, the congregational, and the communal (Counted, 2025a; Long, Counted, et al., 2024).

Table 1

Christian Flourishing Index

	Never true of me (1)	*Rarely true of me* (2)	*Sometimes true of me* (3)	*Often true of me* (4)	*Always true of me* (5)
			OR		
	Never true of me (0)				*Always true of me* (10)

Dimensions	Items
Contentment	1. My love for God is greater than my love for everything else in my life. 2. My hope for being with God is always stronger than all of my earthly desires.
Health	3. I take care of my body because it is a gift from God. 4. I trust in God's faithful love at all times, even in the midst of severe suffering.
Meaning	5. Because I trust God, I will believe all that God has revealed. 6. I trust in God even when I don't understand his purposes.
Character	7. I fervently pray for the establishing of God's kingdom. 8. My confidence in eternal life shapes how I live in the present.
Relationships	9. I love my neighbor as myself. 10. I am fully committed to doing good to those who might consider me their enemy.
Stewardship	11. Every resource I have is used in ways that I believe are pleasing to God. 12. I willingly give up everything God asks of me because of my love for Christ.

Note. Items may be scored using either a 5-point or 11-point response format. 5-point scale: 1 = *Never true of me*, 2 = *Rarely true of me*, 3 = *Sometimes true of me*, 4 = *Often true of me*, 5 = *Always true of me*. 11-point scale: 0 = *Never true of me* to 10 = *Always true of me* (anchor points only).

These domains are not isolated spheres but rather interdependent experiences of a dynamic and cyclical process, where the flourishing of one domain strengthens and sustains the others, and vice versa. The individual domain is the foundation of this cycle. As believers cultivate their faith, strengthen their hope, and embody love, they are transformed into agents of renewal within their faith communities and beyond. A flourishing congregation, in turn, fosters collective worship, discipling relationships, and mutual edification, reinforcing the individual's Christian flourishing while also equipping the church to engage meaningfully with the broader community. When a community is shaped by congregations steeped in the pursuit of the abundant life, it experiences a ripple effect of spiritual and social transformation, extending the impact of Christian flourishing beyond the walls of the church.

While all three domains are essential, this paper focuses on the first—individual domain of Christian flourishing—because it serves as the bedrock upon which the others stand. Without mature and sincere faith among individual Christians, collective expressions of faith can become hollow or easily swayed, and community engagement may lose its transformative power. Christian flourishing at the individual level is best understood through the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, which serve as the scaffolding for a life rooted in the abundant life (Long & VanderWeele, 2023; Romanus-Cessario, 2008). For example, faith anchors the believer in God's promises, providing the spiritual resilience necessary to navigate trials and uncertainties (Koenig et al., 2012, 2023). It orients the heart toward trust in divine providence, shaping an identity that is secure in God's unchanging nature rather than the shifting circumstances of the world (Hebrews 10:23). Hope propels the individual Christian forward to have a vision of God's redemptive missional work in both personal and communal dimensions

(Counted et al., 2022, 2024). It prevents stagnation, urging believers to live with expectancy and purpose (Romans 5:3-5). Love, the greatest of the virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13), compels the individual Christian upward and outward—it is the force that binds the believer to God and to others, transforming personal devotion into self-giving service (Lee & Wellinghoff, 2024; VanderWeele, 2023). These theological virtues form the essence of the abundant life, a life not marked merely by personal contentment but by an ever-deepening participation in God's redemptive work in the world (Bosch, 2011).

Centering our discussion on the individual domain of Christian flourishing is a recognition that true transformation begins within. It is the transformed individual who enriches the congregation and the flourishing congregation that ignites renewal within the broader community. Thus, a theology of Christian flourishing science must first ask: How does the pursuit of the abundant life shape the mind, body, and soul of the believer? The answer to this question will ultimately shape the path forward, not only for personal discipleship but for the flourishing of the church and the world beyond it. However, like all conceptual models, it comes with its own set of advantages and challenges, which we explore below.

Supplemental Versus Replacement Approaches

One of the central discussions emerging from this framework is the choice between a supplemental or a replacement approach to envisioning Christian flourishing. VanderWeele et al. (2021), for instance, recommended a supplemental path in their Christian-specific spiritual well-being measure, augmenting temporal flourishing assessments with distinctively Christian elements. This method allows for comparisons across different samples while acknowledging the relevance of temporal aspects within Christian flourishing, albeit with a nuanced subordination to spiritually oriented components when necessary. Another approach would be to replace general measures of flourishing with distinctively Christian items, like those listed above; for example, by replacing VanderWeele's (2019) 12-item temporal flourishing measure with a new set of 12 items designed to assess Christian flourishing at the individual level. A replacement model allows for measurement that more closely aligns with the biblical realities of the Christian life but does not allow for comparisons outside the Christian context. We anticipate that researchers may also use our measure for either purpose, at times supplementary and at times as a replacement to other measures of flourishing or well-being. These choices will likely depend on several factors, including (a) the need for comparative work, (b) whether a project is taking place across religious or secular populations, or (c) if it aims to explore variation in flourishing within Christian communities themselves. While we acknowledge the value of a both/and approach, particularly for projects that seek to integrate multiple frameworks, we also recognize that further psychometric validation will help determine whether these measures load similarly within Christian populations. In the meantime, we want to provide researchers with two viable options so they can use what best aligns with their project's goals. Ultimately, we hope that the flourishing framework outlined in this paper, along with the items themselves, will serve as meaningful tools for those seeking to better understand and assess flourishing in Christian contexts.

Research Agenda

In our quest to better understand human flourishing, specifically within Christian communities, we propose a research agenda on how to study and measure Christian flourishing, mindful of criticism that empirical work on Christianity risks simplifying or operationalizing religion (Bishop, 2009). Understanding Christian flourishing requires a focused examination of the individual domain (Counted, 2025a; Long, Counted, et al., 2024). This domain serves as the foundation for broader flourishing within congregational and communal settings. The first step in our research agenda is to validate and adapt the individual domain measure across different Christian communities. Establishing its relevance in different denominational contexts will allow for the development of targeted interventions and applications that promote Christian flourishing. This validation ensures that the framework remains applicable and useful for various faith traditions. Second, larger samples and longitudinal research are necessary to examine how the proposed measure evolves across different life stages and transitions. For example, understanding how faith, hope, and love develop over time as pillars of Christian

flourishing may provide valuable insights for pastoral care and congregational support. Such studies could highlight the resilience of Christian flourishing amid personal challenges and societal changes. The third research agenda includes investigating how specific religious practices, such as prayer, worship, and acts of service, contribute to Christian flourishing. Research should identify the mechanisms through which spiritual engagement nurtures faith, strengthens hope, and cultivates love. These scientific insights will help optimize religious practices to support holistic well-being within Christian communities (Koenig et al., 2012, 2023). Fourth, comparative studies could explore how different religious traditions conceptualize and experience flourishing. Doing this would enable researchers to identify universal and tradition-specific pathways to well-being, which could bring further clarity to the flourishing-religion framework. Such studies will not only contribute to research but can foster interfaith dialogue and collaboration in promoting human flourishing on a broader scale.

To bridge theory and practice, targeted interventions will be developed and evaluated across multiple dimensions of the individual domain of Christian flourishing. These interventions will provide practical guidance for individuals and faith leaders seeking to enhance Christian flourishing. Recognizing the complexity of human experience, research should examine how factors like gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation intersect with the individual domain. A better understanding of these intersections will ensure that Christian flourishing is accessible and inclusive amidst the diverse realities of believers worldwide. Other, perhaps more novel, areas of research would be the link between technology and Christian flourishing. Digital platforms and tools influence spiritual practices, community engagement, and personal well-being (Dein & Watts, 2023). Investigating the potential benefits and challenges of technology (e.g., artificial intelligence [AI], virtual workshop services) within Christian communities will provide insights into how digital resources can support or hinder the pursuit of Christian flourishing in a rapidly changing world. Finally, comparative analyses are needed of the individual domain of Christian flourishing (emic) and temporal flourishing (etic). These analyses will help clarify how features of Christian flourishing intersect with broader temporal dimensions of flourishing (e.g., VanderWeele's flourishing measure). This methodological approach will not only contextualize biblical insights and sacred strivings within a wider discourse on flourishing but also can refine existing models of well-being by introducing spiritual dimensions often overlooked in mainstream psychology (Emmons, 2005; Vieten & Lukoff, 2022).

Limitations and Considerations

While the emic approach to Christian flourishing provides a promising direction for understanding well-being in Christian contexts, several challenges must be addressed. As an emic construct, the abundant life concept may not resonate equally with all Christian communities or individuals, particularly those who interpret scripture differently or prioritize different aspects of their faith. Theological issues could arise in applying the framework. For instance, the *dark night of the soul* phenomenon (Dura-Vila & Dein, 2009)—where individuals feel distant from God but are, in fact, deepening their spirituality—could lead to misinterpretation of low scores on some domains (e.g., meaning and purpose, peace and joy). Certain theological traditions that are uncomfortable with the concept of suffering may inadvertently lead to overreporting joy, potentially introducing response bias as a form of spiritual bypass, where genuine struggles are overlooked or minimized. To address these issues, cross-denominational validation of the emic measure is needed to ensure its relevance and adaptability across different Christian contexts.

Second, a further challenge may arise from the tension between the paper's advocacy for an emic approach and its presentation, which at times takes on an etic tone. Some readers might see a limitation in the paper's approach, as it does not adopt an anthropological stance that allows Christianity to disclose its own self-understanding. Instead, it takes an insider perspective, which may create methodological ambiguity. However, this is an intentional choice, as the paper is written from a Christian biblical context-sensitive standpoint rather than a Christian anthropological outlook. Rather than merely describing Christian flourishing as a cultural construct, the paper develops a Christian view of flourishing that is sensitive to the abun-

dant life perspective grounded in theological virtues. This approach prioritizes the application of Christian theological commitments to human well-being, integrating psychology and theology to articulate a distinct framework for flourishing rather than offering a detached, descriptive account of Christian self-understanding.

The third concern arises from the perceived ambiguity in the use of the term theological, which stems from our disciplinary approach rather than a lack of clarity in our framework. Rather than engaging theology in a systematic or doctrinal sense, we developed a Christian biblical account of flourishing grounded in theological virtues. The goal is not to construct a theological framework that fits within the remit of traditional theological scholarship but to conceptualize a biblically informed model of flourishing. Taking a fully theologized approach often leads to denominational disagreements, making it difficult to present a universally applicable perspective across Christian traditions (McGrath, 2016). Since our aim is not to engage in doctrinal debate or theological system-building, we deliberately avoid positioning this as a theological paper. Instead, we integrate theological virtues into an emic scientific paradigm that is accessible and applicable across Christian contexts without requiring adherence to any specific theological tradition. Rather than a limitation, this approach ensures the framework remains relevant for Christian flourishing and well-being research without encountering theological exclusivity or denominational barriers.

Finally, the Christian-specific focus of our flourishing framework may be limited in pluralistic societies where diverse religious and spiritual traditions coexist. This challenge also presents an opportunity for other religious communities to develop their own emic instruments in order to foster a more genuine inclusivity than reliance on etic measures alone (Knabb et al., 2024). Future research and discourse are necessary to refine the current framework, establish its validity and reliability across different Christian communities, and clarify its theological underpinnings to enhance its scholarly and practical contributions.

Conclusion

This paper presents a robust and context-sensitive approach to understand and study flourishing within the Christian context. We integrated the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love into our multidimensional framework of individual Christian flourishing, providing a foundation for both academic research and practical interventions. As we continue to refine and validate this framework, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of human flourishing that honors the unique values and experiences of Christian communities while fostering collaboration across different denominational contexts. Specifically, we have demonstrated how many individualized Christian values and practices can be understood and fostered within each dimension and how these dimensions intersect with one another to promote overall well-being and flourishing. For example, we have highlighted the importance of joy and peace in the context of Christian flourishing, emphasizing the role of faith, spiritual practices, and supportive communities in cultivating these positive emotional states. We have also discussed the significance of mental and physical health, drawing on Christian teachings and practices that promote holistic well-being, such as meditation and bodily discipline. Furthermore, we have explored the meaning and purpose dimension, demonstrating how the abundant life provides a unique perspective on the ultimate eternal goals and values that underpin Christian flourishing. We have also examined the role of character and virtue development, highlighting the importance of spiritual practices, virtuous living, and Christian discipleship relationships in nurturing these qualities. Lastly, we have discussed the importance of stewardship as an important dimension of individual Christian flourishing that reorients a Christian's posture towards material and other resources to one of generosity and honor. Our proposal of an emic construct of Christian flourishing contributes to the growing body of scientific literature on human flourishing, providing a contextually relevant and denominationally sensitive framework for understanding and promoting well-being within Christian communities. This perspective can also serve as a starting point for further research into the unique values, practices, and pathways to flourishing in other religious and cultural contexts.

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