Shrink Rap Radio #105, August 10, 2007, The Psychology of Doing Good

David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka "Dr. Dave" interviews Stephen Post, Ph.D.

(Transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Susan Argyelan)

Excerpt: *You know, in the final analysis, if we can pass the torch of love to the people around us; if we can light a candle in the darkness; if we can encourage our kids to live lives of love, they are going to live happier and healthier and, odds are, longer lives. The idea of love being a source of buoyancy and fulfillment – that's the image I want. I don't want any of this arid, dry stuff – the emaciated, masochistic do-gooder. I want us to understand scientifically that we're wired to do unto others, and when we do that, we experience a fuller life.*

Introduction: That was the voice of my guest, Stephen Post, Ph.D., lead author of the 2007 book, Why Good Things Happen to Good People: The Exciting New Research That Proves the Link Between Doing Good and Living a Longer, Healthier, Happier Life. Dr. Post has written seven scholarly books on unselfish love and giving and is the editor of eight other books. He's Professor of Bioethics and Family Medicine in the School of Medicine, Case Western Reserve University. He's also President of the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, Altruism, Compassion, Service, which was founded in 2001 with a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation. He's published over 140 articles in peer-reviewed journals representing the sciences, religion, and humanities. Dr. Post received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Board of the Alzheimer's Association. Now, here's the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Stephen Post, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Stephen Post: Well, David, I couldn't be anyplace better.

Dr. Dave: Okay, well, that's good! Your latest book, Good Things Happen to Good People, seems to be definitely in step with Martin Seligman's work and all that's happening in the emerging field of positive psychology, yet you've really been on this path on your own since you were in secondary school, haven't you?

Post: Well, that's right. I have been fortunate in life, because when I was thrown out of my home…

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Post: …and cast up into the middle of New Hampshire as a poor, 13-year-old boy at a church-related high school, I had this wonderful teacher up there named Johnny Walker. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs) An unlikely name for somebody in a church school! If people don't know, Johnny Walker is also a whiskey, right?

Post: That's right. So this was the Rev. John Walker, who eventually became the head of the National Cathedral. And he was an African American, and he understood Howard Thurman and Benjamin Elijah Mays and Martin Luther King's work very well. So, I had him to encourage me in thinking about the nature of love and even the metaphysics of love, and there were lots of other good folks up there, too. So, I developed a lifelong interest that I've been able – thank heavens – to maintain, but in all sorts of different kinds of venues: science and religious studies, and working with the deeply forgetful over the years, and now running an Institute for Research on Unlimited Love.

Dr. Dave: Yes, I see that you have that foundation, the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love. And in just six years, you funded over 50 studies at 44 major universities. Now, that's pretty remarkable.

Post: Well, thanks. It's growing all the time, and we've gotten a lot of support from a lot of foundations and individuals to study unselfish giving at its best in human experience – looking at the brain, looking at human development, looking at evolutionary biology and psychology, looking at where philosophy and theology and ethics fit into the picture – trying to understand love in all its aspects. And love, simply put, is as follows. When the happiness and security of another person means as much to me as my own happiness and security, I love that person.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. You know, I couldn't help but think, though, that the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love might sound a bit on the wimpy side to some ears. What's the justification for focusing on such a weak-sounding, insubstantial thing as "unlimited love"? (laughs)

Post: (laughs) Well, listen, you know… Okay. So, unlimited love is about a remarkable human strength to express, in a palpable sense, an abiding love for others, even those who are not near and dear, but rather just among the neediest. A love that seems to be resilient, even in times of inter-group hatred and violence; a love that can confront harmful, destructive, and self-destructive behaviors and yet still remain loving; a kind of love that doesn't worry too much about reciprocal gains or reputational gains, but just loves – and let everything else take care of itself. The kind of love that gets people down to New Orleans after Katrina, or makes our otherwise competent medical students great healers. It's the kind of love that parents have for their kids and that God's supposed to have for everybody. So it is a little ambitious. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah, it's very ambitious, and I was a bit tongue-in-cheek with my provocative question there about it sounding wimpy. And your book really goes a long way towards countering any such suggestions, because you cite a tremendous amount of research that actually supports the idea that giving – in particular, as a

manifestation of love – that giving can lead to health benefits and lengthen our lives, and so many other positive outcomes. One of the things that I was interested to read in your book is that your book evolved out of research that you had been doing on Alzheimer's. Can you tell us a little bit how that evolution happened?

Post: Oh, sure. Well, I spent from 1988 until about 1999 working in the world of the deeply forgetful, both in the Alzheimer's chapters around the country and in Canada, but also as a professor here in the medical school, studying the ways in which caregivers express love to persons with dementia; also looking at the ways in which people with dementia express love. So, I have all sorts of memorable stories, one of which involves a man named Jim, who was out at a nursing home in Chardon, Ohio, called Heather Hill. I sat down with Jim. Having read his biographical statement on the wall, I knew he had two sons, so I asked him, "Jim, how are your boys?" He couldn't respond at all because frankly, his communication system was far gone. However, he had a little branch in his hand, and he handed the branch to me and then smiled so effusively…

Dr. Dave: Hmm…

Post: …that if warmth were electric, the place would've been on fire.

Dr. Dave: Hmm…

Post: I asked the nurse what was the story with Jim. She said he grew up on a farm in Ohio, and he loved his father very, very much. So, he had gone back in time, and it turns out that the chore his father gave him every morning was to bring kindling in for the fireplace. So, that stick that Jim gave me that day in the nursing home was a symbol of the love that he felt from his father and the safety that he felt in the context of that love and attachment. So, love is a resurrection of a sort, even for the most deeply forgetful and the people who care for them.

Dr. Dave: I really like that term that you use for Alzheimer's, the "deeply forgetful". That sounds like a very caring term.

Post: Well, I hope so. And the other thing is that we get a sense of our own position on a continuum, because believe me, we're all a little forgetful…

Dr. Dave: (laughs) I am!

Post: Yeah, I am. At least since, you know, we decline from about age 24 or 25, actually, and we have all sorts of things that we forget as we get into our 50s. That's not dementia, but it's normal, age-related forgetfulness. I like to say, then, "It's okay to forget where you parked your car, but it's not okay to forget that you have a car that's parked."

Dr. Dave: Yeah. (laughs) I…

Post: That's the difference.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I just, this morning, I just caught myself from pouring the orange juice on my cereal instead of the milk…

Post: Ah! That's a good one.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. (laughs) It's not the first time, but fortunately, I caught myself this time, just in time. You know, that story that you shared reminds of a story that you both begin and close your book with, a kind of touchstone about the bus trip that you took.

Post: Oh, yeah! Yep!

Dr. Dave: Yeah, tell us that story.

Post: Milesburg. See, I had a terrible business meeting in New York City in the late summer of 2003. I couldn't get anyplace with this meeting, and yet I couldn't walk out because it would've embarrassed people. So I had to stay until about 7:30, and by that time – it was a Friday night. There was no way on God's earth I was going to get my plane from Newark back to Cleveland. Actually, I'm sorry; it was Thursday night. I had to teach a class the next morning at 8:00, and in medical schools, you know, you don't miss your lectures or you get in a lot of hot water.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I can imagine.

Post: So, I made it over to the Port Authority building on 8th Ave. and 43rd St. about 8:30 or so, and I got on the bus – a nice, big, crowded bus, Trailways – and the driver turns around, he looks at us, he says, "Well, air conditioner's busted." Everybody groans. He asks us if we really want to go to Cleveland. Well, we said, "Yeah." And the guy pulled out of the Port Authority building. And just a few minutes later, some kid tapped me on the back of the shoulder from the seat behind me and asked me, "Sir, are we in Cleveland yet?" I said, "No, not yet, but I'll let you know." And he tapped me on the shoulder every 10 or 15 minutes all the way to Ohio.

Dr. Dave: This was a mentally challenged kid in some way, right?

Post: He had a little Down syndrome.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Post: And he was very affable, very kind, very caring, you know. And the silver lining in a lot of those folks is that they do have a sense of joyful generosity. And he certainly had it, and he was a pleasure. I wasn't bothered by him. It was like, in a way, taking your 8- or 9-year-old child for a drive from Cleveland to Columbus,

Ohio. Every once in a while, you're going to get a tap on the shoulder, "Dad, are we there yet?"

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Post: And the guy in front of me had two little boys. I think they were about five years old. Every half hour, this guy would jump up out of his seat and pound his fist on the metal ceiling of the bus, making a big "ka-bam."

Dr. Dave: Hmm.

Post: And so we got all the way to Milesburg, Pennsylvania. It had to have been about 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning. And Milesburg, Pennsylvania, is a stopover for the buses. So the bus drove into Milesburg, and we stopped at the cantina. Well, it turns out that security wouldn't let this fellow with his two boys back on the bus 'cause he was too violent, and he was frightening everybody. And so we pulled out, and there was that fellow with his boys, just screaming and yelling and kicking the wall. That was a pretty tough sight. After we got out on Route 80 again, the fellow behind me with the Down syndrome tapped me on the shoulder, and he asked me, "Sir, are we in Cleveland yet?" Well, we got to Cleveland; it was about 7:15 or so, 7:30, and I hugged that guy, and we said good-bye. And he went off with some friends who had met him there; I made my lecture. But the moral of the story is, if you don't want to get stuck in Milesburg, stay away from anger, hostility, resentment, bitterness, and all those negative emotions, 'cause they ain't gonna do you much good.

Dr. Dave: (laughs) Okay! Okay, but there was also something I think that you took from that Down syndrome guy tapping you on the shoulder.

Post: Oh, yeah. Basically, you know, if you want to get to Cleveland, do it with love! (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Post: In other words, he was a perfect example of somebody who may not have been cognitively flourishing – he obviously had some cognitive developmental disabilities – but he was profoundly loving. And I think he reveals to us that which is most fundamentally human, that which is really at the essence of being human and that we sometimes forget about.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm… Now, we all seek happiness. What's your prescription for happiness?

Post: Do unto others. Viktor Frankl impresses me. He says you can't pursue happiness directly; it's a by-product of serving others. You could be surrounded by 100 people who love you and adore you, including doting parents, and I'm telling you,

you will not be happy until you learn to actually give love. You can receive all the praise and adulation and affirmation on earth, but it's when you really begin to discover – stumble on – the happiness of giving that you really discover the core and the root of goodness.

Dr. Dave: Yes, I –

Post: And happiness.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, in your book you say, "Give daily in small ways and you'll be happier. Give and you will be healthier. Give and you will live longer."

Post: Right.

Dr. Dave: And then you go on to say, "Giving is good medicine." So what's behind that statement, "Giving is good medicine"?

Post: Well, it's not just that you're going to be happier on the whole – and there's a lot of science to support that. In fact, most Americans – say, 76% of Americans – answer that – to a Time/CNN poll question – that the thing that makes them the most happy in life is contributing to the lives of others.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm…

Post: The only things that top that are the 78% who say that their children make them happy and the 77% who say that friends make them happy. So in general, it's these opportunities to give to others, to be pro-social, to be contributing to the lives of others that seems to be a formula for happiness. And it's not that different than the images you get in Ebenezer Scrooge, who's completely miserable while he's isolated and lonely and selfish, and as he becomes a little more giving, he get happier. And by the end of the story, he's up and down the streets of (inaudible) city in England, and he's the happiest man around. He's also helping everybody in sight.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Now, again, expand a little bit on the idea that giving is good medicine. I mean, there's…

Post: Medicine! Oh, yeah! Absolutely. Oh, sure. Well, listen, I'm going to be very clear about this. There's a, just to put a context here, there's an old personality inventory that's been used in America for many years, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory.

Dr. Dave: Sure, the MMPI.

Post: MMPI. So, a fellow at Duke named Reynolds Williams in the 1990s took 50 questions from the MMPI that he most associated with hostility. I mean cynicism,

aggressiveness, anger, bitterness, etc. He called this the Hostility Scale. And he looked at those MMPI tests that were taken in 1950, okay?

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Post: And what he found was the top 25% of the Hostility Scale had a death rate of 20% by age 50.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Post: Those who were in the lower 25% of the Hostility Scale had a 2%-4% death rate.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Post: And so basically, a lot of hostility, hostile emotions, rage, bitterness, rumination – those things are like acid on metal. They corrode the body. In these studies, most of those folks who were dying at age 50 were dying of vascular disease and coronary problems. And so that's something to recognize. But they were also more susceptible to cancer and some other important diseases. So, that's kind of interesting. And then you get these remarkable studies in nursing homes, where once you untie people in nursing homes – you let them free of their restraints and you allow them a certain amount of freedom in just everyday activities, including decision-making – they have half the death rate over a five-year period than those who, in fact, are not given these opportunities. So in general terms, emotions can be very destructive, not just to psychological health but to physical health. And, so what we show in a study that was conducted by Paul Wink, for example, at Wellesley, in the Massachusetts area, younger people from the 1920s who have been followed every ten years of their lives very extensively by interview teams, with their medical records in hand, these people, the ones who as youngsters – this study started about 1930 when these people, the subjects, were only in their teens or college-age – the ones who identified an altruistic purpose ("I want to use my talents to help humanity"), they were, first of all, happier over the course of their lives, by self-report. They were shielded from depression dramatically, and they were shielded from stress-induced illnesses. Odds are, they even live a little longer. So, in general, it's good to be good; we seem to be wired for it. And when we don't behave in a kind of generous way, it does us harm.

Dr. Dave: Well, that's interesting. And there's plenty of other research that you cite in the book that goes along to support that as well. In your chapter on the Love and Longevity Scale – you know, speaking of the MMPI – you, I guess you worked with some other people to develop a more positively oriented kind of instrument called the Love and Longevity Scale.

Post: Right.

Dr. Dave: And you talk about the four domains of giving and the ten ways of giving, so I want to go into that. What are these four domains? If you want to talk about the scale some, you can talk about that, and then tell us about these four domains of giving.

Post: Well, the domains are, you know, the nearest and the dearest, typically family members and friends. And then you get to neighborhood; you get to – eventually – workplace, schools, community. And then finally, you get to the neediest, to all humanity, to the kind of giving that people do for those who just need it, even if they're perfect strangers. And so it's this balance between family, friendship, neighborhood, community, and then all humanity. It's this sense of wanting to be intentional about the ways of love in all those different domains or spheres of activity.

Dr. Dave: So, the domains are –

Post: That's what that's all about.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. So, the domains really are like four expanding circles out from us, with broader and broader reach. Now, what about the Love and Longevity Scale? What's that about?

Post: Well, there are ten ways of giving that are emphasized in the book and that I've been writing about for many years. Attentive listening is one, loyalty is another – it's hard to imagine loving somebody if you're not at all loyal to them, you know?

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Post: It's hard to imagine loving somebody if you don't listen to them attentively. The ways of love are really important to reflect on. It's as though love is the hub of a wheel, and all these manifestations of love are the spokes. So, respect is a form of love. Compassion is a form of love for those who are suffering; it's an immediate response to the suffering. Forgiveness is a form of love for those who need forgiveness. Love takes many different forms and varieties. Creativity is a form of love. People often use their creativity to help the people around them; to give to the ones that they care about. And so, at the end of every chapter of every way of giving – of every way of love – there's a 20-item scale that a person can take, and it gives them a sense of whether they're in the top or in the second or the third or the bottom tier in that particular way of giving. Now, the scales are scientifically validated in the sense that scales are. They were all tested and analyzed among students at the University of Miami with the help of Mike McCullough, who's a real expert in scale development, and they give you a good sense of your strengths; they give you a picture of your life of love in all the domains and all the ways of love. And hopefully, you can build on your strength, because most people do have strength. But on the other hand, if you've got some glaring weaknesses that you might be able to attend to, it's a good idea to work on those as well.

Dr. Dave: Well, you call it the Love and Longevity Scale. What's the "longevity" part?

Post: Well, that's a bold name for the scale…

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Post: …but the point is that people who are generous and giving do, on average, tend to live longer than those who are selfish. That's very well demonstrated in studies on older adults, whether the researchers at Stanford or Berkeley or the University of Michigan are looking at formalized volunteering activities or informal helping activities. People who are helpers tend to live longer. Again, sometimes the good die young, like Billy Joel sang it. But as a generalization statistically, the fact of the matter is that the good will typically be happier and healthier and live a little longer life – maybe in some studies, three or four or five years longer, on average – than those who are at the low end of the giving scales. So, what's going on there? I think it's really a matter less of action than a psychological and emotional state. When we are less focused and obsessed with the self and its problems and more centered on others, I think there is a process of freedom involved there. I think people discover joy and a peace of mind when they reach out to others, and they don't have that joy and peace of mind when they're just totally wrapped up in themselves.

Dr. Dave: Huh. That makes me wonder if anybody has tried this in a sort of disciplined way as a treatment for, say, depression. If we prescribe giving to get patients to engage in –

Post: Well, they did. See - yes. So there is a little history here. In the 1820s in America, the big six asylums were built. This is McLean Hospital in Boston, the Institute of Living in Hartford, the Philadelphia Asylum, and they were all designed in reaction to the way in which people with mental illness and melancholy were treated earlier on. They were basically kept in chains, restrained, in hostile states – it was a horrible situation. But in 1820, a movement began called moral treatment, and the idea was that if you could just let these folks live together and allow them to have positive, pro-social roles, that they would do well. So Olmsted designed Central Park in New York; designed the great, sweeping lands of these asylums. And people would bale the hay, milk the cows, paint the barn – just do positive things contributing to the life of the community. And what they found was that melancholy subsided. And in modern days, there's the clubhouse movement, which began in, I guess, the 1940s in New York and has spread nationally, where people who are living in the communities instead of in mental hospitals and the like, become members of these communities. They don't live in them, but they visit them most of the hours of the day, and the key thing is that they have positive chores – you know, do things for others. And they pick those chores, so there's a certain amount of freedom and autonomy in the process. Well, this is important.

And you know, even taking alcoholism, we have a study which isn't in the book 'cause it's too new, but we did fund it. In the 12-step program for Alcoholics Anonymous, the 12th step is help other people with alcoholism. And the folks who do that have a 40% recovery rate…

Dr. Dave: Hmm…

Post: …after one year of entering treatment. The ones who don't fulfill the 12th step – that is to say, help other people with alcoholism – they have only a 22% recovery rate. So across areas of disease, it turns out that cultivating compassion and doing unto others tends to be good for one's psychological and physical health.

Dr. Dave: Well, that's real interesting. You know, the way that you talk about the ways of giving, it triggered in me the idea of a spiritual path, or like a yogic kind of path to enlightenment. You talk about the way of celebration, the way of courage, the way of forgiveness, the way of compassion…

Post: Right.

Dr. Dave: So, that was interesting to me. Maybe we could focus on some of those ways. For example, you have a whole chapter on The Way of Celebration: Turning Gratitude Into Action. Talk about that a bit.

Post: Yeah, so, gratitude – that deep sense of gratitude for the people around us and the kind of cosmic gratitude for many, it's reflected in most spiritual traditions: the attitude of gratitude for the universe we live in, for a generative planet Earth, for the beauty of nature, and so forth. Yeah, gratitude studies indicate that people who are grateful certainly self-report greater happiness, tend to be less anxious, and tend to be somewhat shielded from depression.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Post: So, celebration is just a kind of gratitude with a special "oomph." We want to celebrate…

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Post: …the major achievements of a person's life. We want to express our thanks to them, we want to buy them a cake, we want to throw a party, we want to do something special for them. That is an expression of love. Love isn't all about – this is where I'm not a Buddhist, although I love Buddhism – but this is where love is not just about compassion. Compassion literally is an immediate response to the suffering of another human being. Well, that's a really important part of love, and thank heavens that we generally have it, although sociopaths don't, and we struggle sometimes at the interface between them and us. But by and large, compassion is incredibly important, and yet it's not the whole story of love, because another very

important expression of love is just celebration. I mean, think about how dour and unrewarding life would be if we didn't celebrate our lives together, right?

Dr. Dave: Yeah. I –

Post: And so, celebration matters.

Dr. Dave: I want to make sure I understood that piece about "That's why I'm not a Buddhist." You say the Buddhists talk about compassion, but what's the second piece that they leave out?

Post: Well, compassion is one really important expression of love. It's one of ten expressions of love, but it's only one of ten.

Dr. Dave: Oh, okay.

Post: And so, the Buddha goes out of his palace and for the first time, as he's out in the streets, he sees the people are really suffering. And he feels, for the first time, compassion toward that suffering. That's a wonderful, wonderful story; it makes a lot of sense. And so, whenever I read a Buddhist statement on these kinds of themes, it's always a statement about compassion. But compassion is just one form of love. Another form of love is what we call "care-frontation," the ability to caringly confront destructive and self-destructive behaviors in others, and hanging onto people in that process and guiding them to a newer level of insight. That's important, too, when a social activist confronts in a loving way. Martin Luther King wrote his sermons, The Strength to Love. When somebody confronts social injustice out of love, for those who are victims of that injustice, that's a form of love, too. And so, love can take many different forms, and compassion is one of the important and essential forms of love, but it's certainly not the whole story.

Dr. Dave: Okay. And, we were talking about celebration, and I was surprised and delighted to read on page 37 of your book, you actually talk about an incident with, I guess a mutual friend, or two friends, who actually I've interviewed on this show. Longtime listeners will remember my interview with Drs. Gail and Dale Ironson. And you talking about, you have a point here that says, "Celebrate now." And you write, "I recently spoke with a psychologist, Dale Ironson, Ph.D., who with his sister, the psychiatrist and psychologist Gail Ironson, MD, Ph.D., of the University of Miami, is studying spiritual transformation in AIDS patients." Hopefully, I have some listeners who will remember that. And you go on to say, "I asked him what he wanted to celebrate at that very moment, and he did not hesitate to reel off a list: "my nice conversation with you, my many friends, the beautiful day, and the delicious food I eat when people in other places are starving; and the incredible age I'm living in, with all the fantastic discoveries going on." So, you go on to say, "Keep your celebration list or journal easily available and add to it when you have the time and inclination." So, I was delighted to see you quoting my good friend

there, and in fact, that is very characteristic of my friend, Dale – that he is mindful to celebrate.

Post: Oh, yeah. It's really important, it's really important. I'm a married guy; I've been married for 25 years. I've got an anniversary coming up in about a week and a half, and we're going to celebrate.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Post: We celebrate birthdays, we celebrate graduations, you know – the smile and the joy involved. But just every day we need to have an attitude of celebration and gratitude for the people and the world around us. And when we do that, people keep gratitude journals, and they report enhanced degrees of happiness. You know, it's important. And look at the – gosh, there isn't a scripture in any world religious tradition that doesn't spend a lot of time giving thanks for the universe.

Dr. Dave: I've certainly found it to be a powerful technique. Years ago, one of my colleagues – and now he denies it. He doesn't remember it – but I'm sure he's the one who suggested to me the idea of, before falling asleep at night, laying in bed to kind of review the day and to review the interactions to be grateful for.

Post: Yes.

Dr. Dave: And boy, the times I've done that – anytime I remember to do that and I take the time to look back over the day, I discover – it's kind of a discovery process as well as an affirmation process – I realize, "Hey, that was wonderful when so-and-so said such-and-such," or the way somebody looked at me, or that I was able to help someone out; just to review those incidents.

Post: Oh, I think that kind of internal review after the day is really important. And I do that when I get the chance, most days, as soon as I get up in the morning.

Dr. Dave: Ah!

Post: I get up pretty early. And I try to spend just 15 or 20 minutes visualizing the interactions that I know I have planned for the day. And I ask myself, "You know, gee, there's Tom. When I meet Tom, I want to make sure that Tom has a sense that I'm loyal to him," or, "I want to make sure that Sally, who just lost a job. I notice that I'm there with her, that I want to try to help her and be generative and useful to her in finding a new job." I try to…you know, in the book "Mirth," laughter is an expression of love. Well-placed, well-timed humor can help people completely reframe their view of the future. It's a way of giving, of uplifting the people around us, and it's hard to find the Dalai Lama or Mother Teresa talking about love or compassion without also talking about joy and mirth. And so, I think about whether someone really needs a smile and a clever one-liner that will just make their day.

And so, I think about all the people I'm going to meet, and I try to anticipate the kinds of expressions of love that are most beneficial for them.

Dr. Dave: That's a wonderful suggestion. And just to put you on the spot here, (laughs) I'm wondering if you thought about this interview this morning before it came up, and if you had any intention that you wanted to express as you thought about it.

Post: Well, you know what? Interesting. Actually, because I drove down to Cincinnati and back yesterday, which was a full eight hours of driving, and I got in late last night, and I had to get up super-early this morning to teach a medical class of first-year students, this is one of those days, quite honestly, when I just got out of my routine and didn't do the kind of early-day visualization that I typically would do otherwise. But yesterday, certainly, as I was driving on Rte. 71 in my car and had my appointment book open on the passenger's seat beside me, I did very carefully look over all my activities for today. So, I thought about the students I would be meeting with from 8:00-10:00 and how I would want to interact with them, and how I would want to express love with that group. I thought about some people I needed to respond to by e-mail, talking with someone like yourself, and then there are lots of other things in the day going on as well. Of course, my wife and my son, Andrew, are visiting Japan for two weeks, so I don't have to worry too much about the nearest and the dearest. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Yeah. (laughs) Now, our mutual friend, Dale Ironson, who I've mentioned now a couple of times, he mentioned to me that you're going to be speaking before the U.S. Congress in October.

Post: October 9th.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. What's that about?

Post: Well, it's a fall spiritual retreat, and it's run out of the chaplain's office there. It's voluntary, so not all the congressmen attend. I heard that about 150, maybe 200, do – congressmen and senators.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Post: And, what I'm going to do is talk with them about the ten ways of love, of giving, including respect. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Post: Civility, you know? But lots of other things. And that'll be based on the book – the new book – Why Good Things Happen to Good People. And I'm waiving my, any speaker's fee, so that they can pick up a copy of the book and give it to everybody who attends.

Dr. Dave: Oh, that's wonderful. Well, it's about time for us to wrap things up here, and as we do, I wonder if there are any last thoughts that you'd like to leave with our listeners.

Post: Well, I'll tell you, I think love competes with a few other basic emotional states: anger, hostility, hatred, fear…

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Post: And when you think about the options, love looks pretty good. And if you can stay in that kind of positive energy, it doesn't mean that you're not going to have to address evil in the world; it's not that you're going to be able to avoid confrontations that will just come your way. You don't have to necessarily look for them, you know? I mean, there's real hurt in the world; hurt people hurt people, I like to say. But in the final analysis, if we can pass the torch of love to the people around us, if we can light a candle in the darkness, if we can encourage our kids to live lives of love, they are going to live happier and healthier and, odds are, longer lives. And this is all that spirituality comes down to, in my view. In the end, every great tradition teaches a transformation from, call it, "I/it" to "I/thou." In "I/it" you treat people only because they contribute to your little agenda, and "I/thou," you discover a sense of awe before the beauty of another person, and you take them into account in a deeper and fuller sense. And there's still an "I" – there's an "I/it" and "I/thou" – there's still an "I," but it's a deeper, a truer, a more fulfilled, a happier "I." Sometimes you look at the life of a Martin Luther King or a Dietrich Bonhoeffer; their lives do get cut short because of the special work that they seem to be put on the earth to do, but it's not that they were seeking an early end, but somehow it found them. And they accepted it with courage. The idea of love being a source of buoyancy and fulfillment, that's the image I want. I don't want any of this arid, dry stuff – the emaciated, masochistic do-gooder. I want us to understand scientifically that we're wired to do unto others, and when we do that, we experience a fuller life.

Dr. Dave: Boy, that's sure a different brand of psychology than I was initially exposed to as an undergraduate and that many students are still exposed to, and it's, you're a wonderful embodiment of what I hope will be a growing force in psychology.

Post: Well, thank you very, very much, and it's a pleasure to be talking to you. And I wish everybody out there in California the very best. I love the West Coast. I was actually out there in the summer of '69 as a 16-year-old, (laughs) out in the Bay Area.

Dr. Dave: That was a good time! (laughs)

Post: Playing, I was playing classical guitar in Hispanic restaurants in the Mission District.

Dr. Dave: Oh, wow.

Post: And living with my cousin, George, who'd been a Green Beret for a couple of tours of duty. He was a bit older than me. And, really had an interesting time out there; even went to college out West for a while.

Dr. Dave: Well, that's great, although I don't know if you're aware of it, but we have a worldwide audience, so people all over the world will be hearing this interview.

Post: Oh, great.

Dr. Dave: So, Dr. Stephen Post, thanks so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Post: Oh, all righty! Thanks - Wishin' you well!

Dr. Dave: Okay. Thank you.