

I think hugs are generally good. There have been many times in my life when a hug seemed to effortlessly alleviate something unwanted: physical pain, emotional pain or sadness, dread, fear, disappointment, anger... How could that be? Is there a mechanism in us that gets triggered when we get a hug that somehow solves problems and erases bad feelings? Yes, in fact **there is a mechanism**; here goes my engineering nerdiness again.

Oxytocin is a neurotransmitter that produces a feeling of security and trust when it is released. It is also known to increase feelings of generosity and forgiveness. A hug is one thing that can trigger the production of oxytocin and its release into our system. Keep in mind that **the hug needs to be at least 20 seconds long** for this chemical to be secreted into our brain and blood system. So, the short hugs that we give to our friends and acquaintances are not going to result in a deep, trusting bond that we can feel with someone very close to us. There are other things that scientific studies have shown to induce a release of this trust building, soul comforting substance in us. Breastfeeding, cuddling, dancing, massages, and **praying have all been shown to release oxytocin in humans**. And there are benefits other than trust and perception of security that we can receive from regular doses of oxytocin.

- Lower blood pressure
- Support the immune system (by stimulating the thymus gland)
- Lower heart rate
- Lower stress (lowers cortisol levels)
- Improve sleep (that cortisol again!)
- Stimulate the brain's memory centers
- Reduce pain (both physical and emotional)
- Reduce anxiety
- Make you happier overall

We hug people we love when they are leaving us. In 1Sam 40:21, David and Jonathan are sad to be parting ways and kiss – surely they hugged as well. Paul received hugs when he left.

When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship. (Acts 20:36-38)

We hug people we love when they return to us. Like how Esau ran to meet Jacob after he returned from Paddan Aram 14 years after fleeing. And the parable of prodigal son:

"So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. (Luke 15:20)

We hug people we love when we want them to get better, to show them we care about them, to comfort their pain, discouragement, fear, and worry.

"Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them. (Mark 10:15-16)

Did you notice above what scientists have discovered? **Praying releases oxytocin!** I wonder how THAT can be true. Seriously, when do we feel safer than when we approach the throne of God?

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

God even hints to us about the **physical health benefits we get from hugs** – especially hugs from Him:

*"As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; And you will be comforted in Jerusalem." Then you will see this, and your heart will be glad, **And your bones will flourish like the new grass;** And the hand of the LORD will be made known to His servants, But He will be indignant toward His enemies. (Isaiah 66:13-14)*

Solomon told us that sometimes we should not hug. I guess he's talking about physical hugs in times of pestilence. Timely advice, I know. But the **comforting from God we need to seek always.**

A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. (Ecclesiastes 3:5)

There is common imagery in the scriptures of how we are sheltered, protected, comforted, effectively embraced, **under the wings of God.** I am comforted just by reading it!

He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. (Psalms 91:4)

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. (Matthew 23:37)

How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. (Psalms 36:7)

I read a great essay called [Under God's Wings](#) written in 1912 by J. R. Miller. He talks about the protection and comfort we receive from our Creator and how the wings of a mother bird are usually wide enough to cover her brood of chicks. But, in Malachi, the image used is the **infinitely long rays of the sun that are long enough to cover, protect, and embrace all who follow Him.**

"But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. (Malachi 4:2)

Pray for each other often to get a shot of oxytocin, and when appropriate, **hug each other for at least 20 seconds!** Regular doses will improve your life.

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

Peace to you and glory to God!

-Nate

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