Theology of Appreciative Inquiry

Main ideas:
Not ignoring problems, incorporating them. Example of Psalms.
Importance of community and how we influence each other.
Commands in the Bible to be grateful – based on God’s work for us.
Theology provides a basis for joy in the midst of darkness.

Other ideas:
Psalms as a model for expressing both joy and problems.
Theology of depravity - there is still good in the world even though it is fallen. Also there is hope for redemption, and we are to participate in the redemptive work. A hopeless or resigned attitude is counter to this. [Find support for these ideas?]
Communal rejoicing - Psalms, command in Philippians
Psalms demonstrate expressing thanksgiving in spite of problems. (Look up examples.)
Include example of Seble’s experience. Finding hope in midst of despair.
Inter-faith dialogue – examples in AI books

James 1:2

Scot MicKnight - James

72 - all joy is "inner confidence that permits fidelity to follow Jesus of one's confidence in the goodness of God, in God's sovereign control of history and eternity, and in one's inner transformation, which wells up into a sense of joyfulness."

Christians facing persecution and martyrdom in the early church.
75 Can include daily trials, internal trials, external trials.

Moo - James

52 "James does not, then, suggest that Christians facing trials will have no response other than joy, as if we were commanded never to be saddened by difficulties. His point, rather, is that trials should be an occasion for genuine rejoicing."

54 We can rejoice "because we know that God uses trials to perfect our faith and make us stronger Christians."
Philippians 4:4

Witherington - Philippians

245 Paul "does not say 'rejoice in your circumstances always.' He says 'rejoice in the Lord always.'" "The ongoing living presence of Christ in the believer's life is a source of all sorts of things, including a sort of joy that even negative circumstances cannot take away."

"Note that rejoicing is not optional for a Christian, it is commanded." "emphatically commanded" - repeated.

"A Christian habit or discipline... not an occasional or sporadic outburst of emotion - the verb is in the present continual tense."

"Verb is in the plural here, probably talking about a corporate, not a private individual activity." [Fits with appreciative inquiry that we can build off each other's joy.]

Hansen - Philippians

287 "The simple phrase in the Lord provides the essential key to joy in every circumstance... Our relationship with the Lord is so central and determinative in our lives that all other factors cannot shake our sense of enthusiasm in the Lord."

288 Psalms - "corporate ownership."

Appreciative Inquiry and the Catholic Church

p. 11 Value and inter-connectedness of all members

Matt. 25:40 “Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me.”

1 Corinthians 12:20-26 Members of one body

pp. 11-12 Fits with Pope Paul VI on importance of dialogue – between God and men. Should be positive dialogue.

p. 13 “The heart of the church is the Good News.”

p. 15 Vatican II focus on just relationships

p. 60 Interfaith Center

Welcoming outsiders – Deuteronomy 10:19, Matthew 25:35

p. 62 Watkins and Mohr Appreciative Inquiry worked with Episcopal Church

Branson - Memories, Hopes and Conversations

43 Gratitude. Henri Nouwen quote.
44 NT concerned with congregations - groups and how they relate.

45 1 Thessalonians - problems in congregations - fear and seduction. Conflict, vengeance.

Doesn't begin with problems but thanksgiving. Understand commands for fixing problems in context of gratitude. (Reason for fixing problems.)

46 "Gratitude is not just a fleeting emotion - it is foundational. As a response to God's gracious initiatives, gratitude changes us at our very core." Not emotions, but a stance.

"The absence of gratitude is a primary sign that persons have turned away from God - that God's presence and initiatives are being rejected." Rom. 1:18, 21 - wrath of God against those who do not honor or thank God.

Turning away from God's gifts to demand something else.

Reminders in OT to remember God's saving works - Ten Commandments, Psalms.

47 Psalms - 3, 4

Brueggemann - psalms of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. Psalms in each category include praise and thanksgiving. Psalm 6. Psalm 22.

48 When thanksgiving stops, there is disobedience. [Example of Israelites in the Wilderness, prophets. The answer is to remember the good things God has done.]

49 "Remembering (with gratefulness) is an essential means of salvation and hope."

Remember specific narratives - creation, exodus, provision. Psalm 78, 145.

Practice all the types described by Brueggeman - have times for orientation, disorientation, or new orientation.

50 Beatitudes redefine blessedness. "A community that lives with these characteristics in vulnerability and receptivity to the presence of God's reign will find themselves embraced, reconciled, comforted, even recreated."

51 Jesus healing the 10 lepers - Luke 17:12. "Thankfulness is a direct indication of underlying faith."

Revelation - letters to the churches open with appreciation for their good qualities. Still have correction in them too.

52 Appreciative Inquiry writings do not include lament and confession. "Easy for organizational conversations to become mired in negative, repetitious analysis that leads to blame and defensiveness, there is little confidence in the role that might be played by these social-spiritual practices... The framework of gratitude can create an environment in which lament and confession can be properly generative. I also believe that genuine lament and confession will lead to gratitude."

"Sorrow apart from God's grace can lead to despair; guilt realized apart from God is debilitating." But God's grace can make these things sources of joy because we have found the answer to them. [Quote from Paul about what was weakness is now strength.]
52-53 “Christian faith lives fully in reality – facing the darkness of any age, knowing our own weaknesses and sins and follies, resigning from any ideas about saving ourselves or generating our own hopes. When we enter God’s grace with gratitude we can be honest about our circumstances and ourselves. Gratitude alters our perceptions so we can see and receive more of God.” Can recognize sins, confess and find restoration. Experience gratitude as a result.

Brueggemann – psalms of disorientation include some element of praise.

53 Psalm 74 – corporate lament. [Examples of losses in theological higher ed, society because of recession]

“Memories and lament and hope belong together.”

54 Paul begins letters with thanksgiving which “provide the context for corrections and instructions about the changes that will be sought.” Paul “notes their own positive narratives... seeks a change... and ends with an expression of confidence.”

Importance of narrative and stories. [Bible as example of this – story of God’s people, their identity.] Must be based in God’s story, not cultural or societal stories.

55 Biblical principles behind 5 AI processes.

1) Choose the positive.
   If wanting to move beyond minor changes, need to reshape. Must do preparation.
   Paul follows step-by-step plan for change: beings with appreciation and encouragement.
   Remembers church’s founding story. “Names some strengths, recalls stories of faithfulness, and personalizes those memories with names.”

56 “Change often begins with our own awareness of barriers, resistance, fears and potential counter-agendas.”

“Paul works to move congregations from words that counter grace” (1 Corinthians 1; Ephesians 4; Colossians 3). Instead “words that build up” (Col. 3:16 – “with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms;” Eph. 5:20 “giving thanks to God the Father at all time and for everything”).

2) Inquire into stories.
   Paul encouraged people to remember certain narratives (Eph. 2:4-5).
   [Old Testament rememberances of God’s provision.]

58 “Reforming of... conversations along positive lines is not avoidance but reorientation.”

3) Locate themes
   Stories “contain threads of cohesion and meaning.”

59 Paul connecting disparate people (Jews and Gentiles) with “larger themes of what God is doing.”

“Paul’s stories of weakness give him an opportunity to ‘boast’ of God’s graces” (2 Cor. 11-12).

“Find parallels between personal and corporate stories and biblical accounts.”

4) Create shared images.
“Stories from the past are linked with wishes for the future.”

60 Paul provides images for the church as a body (1 Cor. 12)

61 Jesus used metaphors and parables. Sometimes called to extraordinary acts, sometimes to ordinary ones – foundational activities.

Isaiah 54 – vision of a city.

5) Find innovative ways.
   “Images are essential but inadequate. Innovation requires discourse, commitment and implementation.”

63 Karl Barth – “Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Grace evokes gratitude like the voice an echo.” “Only gratitude can correspond to grace, and this correspondence cannot fail. Its failure, ingratitude, is sin, transgression. Radically and basically all sin is simply ingratitude.”

64 “Without this posture of gratefulness we lose our way.”

**AI principles and theology**

Branson 55 Biblical principles behind 5 AI processes.

1) Choose the positive. (55)

2) Inquire into stories. Paul encouraged people to remember certain narratives (Eph. 2:4-5). (56)


4) Create shared images. 61 Jesus used metaphors and parables. Visions in the prophets.

5) Find innovative ways. Taking action.

   To highlight: stories and images.

**Brueggeman – The Message of the Psalms**

57 Movement from pleas to praise.

**Principles of AI (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, p. 53)**

1) The Constructionist Principle
   No absolute reality, it is constructed - doesn’t fit with idea of absolute truth.
   Deeply interconnected – biblical idea of community
Words create worlds – Genesis, book of John

2) The Simultaneity Principle
   As soon as we question, change happens. Importance of first steps in change, and working with others.

3) The Poetic Principle
   **Whatever we focus on grows** – Philippians passage “Whatever is true...”

3) The Anticipatory Principle
   Vision affects future. **How we view the eternal story affects how we act.** But future is ultimately in God’s control.

4) The Positive Principle
   Build on positive emotions and strengths. In Christianity, can also build on weaknesses.

5) The Wholeness Principle
   Look at the whole picture – **importance of community and interconnectedness.**

6) The Enactment Principle
   Embody what you want to see happen – Christian importance of behavioral change. Actions demonstrate inner change.

7) The Free Choice Principle
   Ability to choose one’s own participation.

8) Awareness principle
   Act with awareness

9) Narrative principle
   Stories are powerful – Bible is stories.