

HOW CHURCH AND FAITH ENHANCE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH



Presentation by Patrick Chisholm and Steve Hemler, www.cainaweb.org

Presentation Overview

- The Mental Health Crisis
- Churchgoing Enhances Mental Health
- Churchgoing Enhances Life Outcomes
- Churchgoing Enhances Physical Health
- Reasons Why Churchgoing Enhances Mental and Physical Health

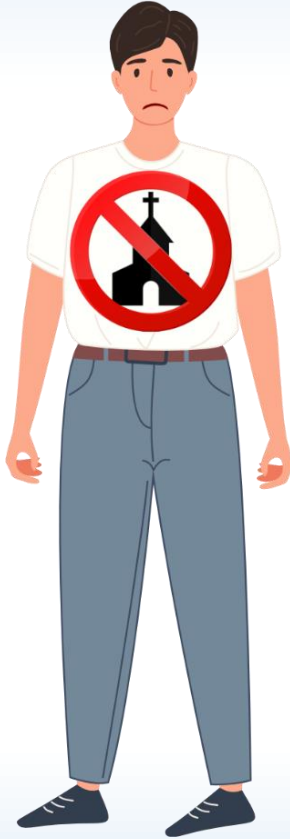
The Mental Health Crisis



Unhappiness is reaching crisis levels.



The decline in religious practice is much to blame.



- The drop-off in churchgoing is fueling the rise in “deaths of despair” – from depression, drugs, and drink.





AMERICA'S RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

Without God in our lives, our hearts are restless.

- We are prone to dissatisfaction, anxiety, or even depression.



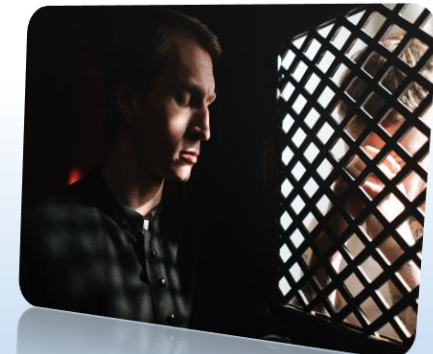
- “Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee”
- St. Augustine

Video: the mental health crisis (esp. youth) and fall-off of faith

Churchgoing Enhances Mental Health

Happiness is not just reserved for the afterlife in heaven.

- It is obtainable in this life as well.
- To do that, it is necessary to live out the teachings of the Church.



Churchgoing Enhances Mental Health

Actively religious people tend to be happier

% who say they are "very happy," among those who are religiously ...



Evidence abounds that embracing God and church commonly results in true happiness in this life.

Compared with people who only sometimes, rarely, or never go to church, regular churchgoers tend to have greater emotional wellness.

- These conclusions are based on literally thousands of surveys and studies.

Note: The actively religious are those who identify with a religion and attend religious services at least once per month. Inactives are those who identify with a religion and attend less often. Unaffiliated are those who do not identify with a religious group.
Source: Data for United States from Pew Research Center's 2012 Gender and Generations survey. Data for all other countries from World Values Survey, 2010-2014.

"Religion's Relationship to Happiness, Civic Engagement and Health Around the World"

Churchgoing Enhances Mental Health

Peer-reviewed academic studies on the mental and physical benefits of churchgoing continually get published in prestigious scholarly journals

- They include *JAMA*, *The BMJ*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Lancet*, and many more.

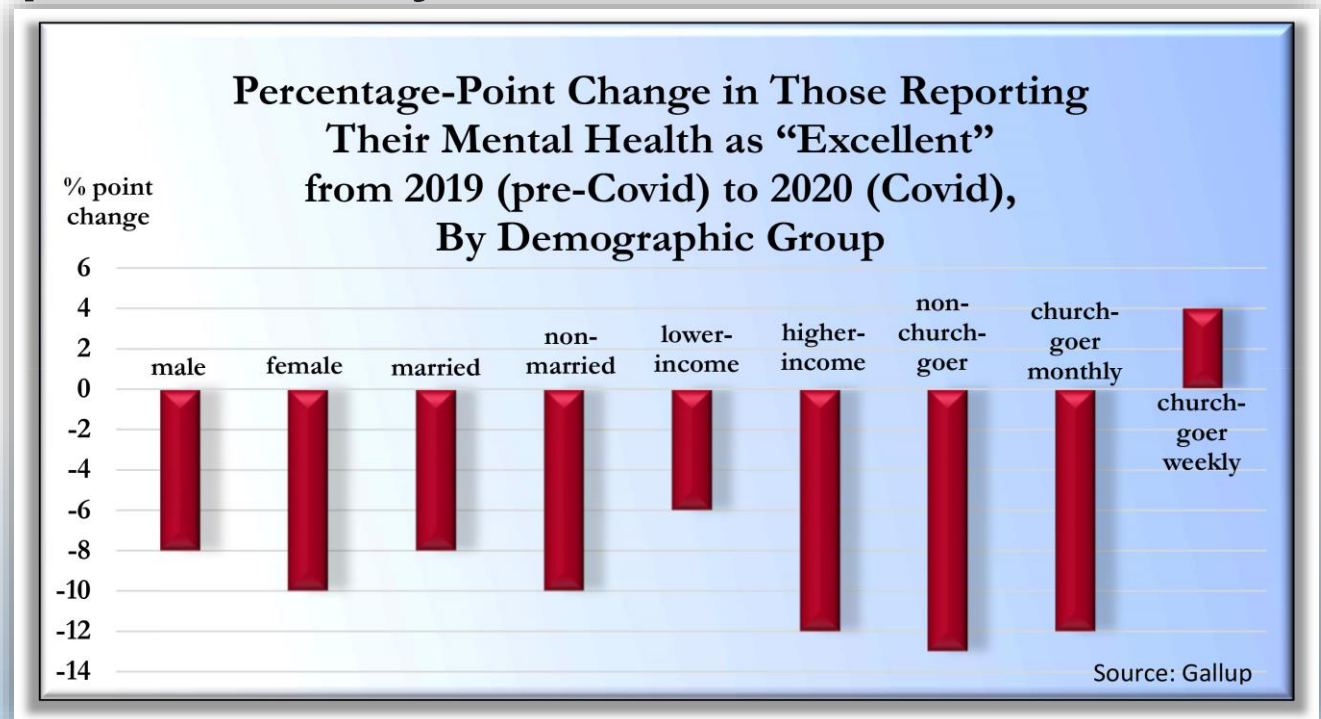


- The investigators are psychologists, sociologists, physicians, epidemiologists, and biomedical scientists at hundreds of prominent universities and hospitals.

Video: scholars attest to religion's positive health effects

Covid, Church, and Mental Health

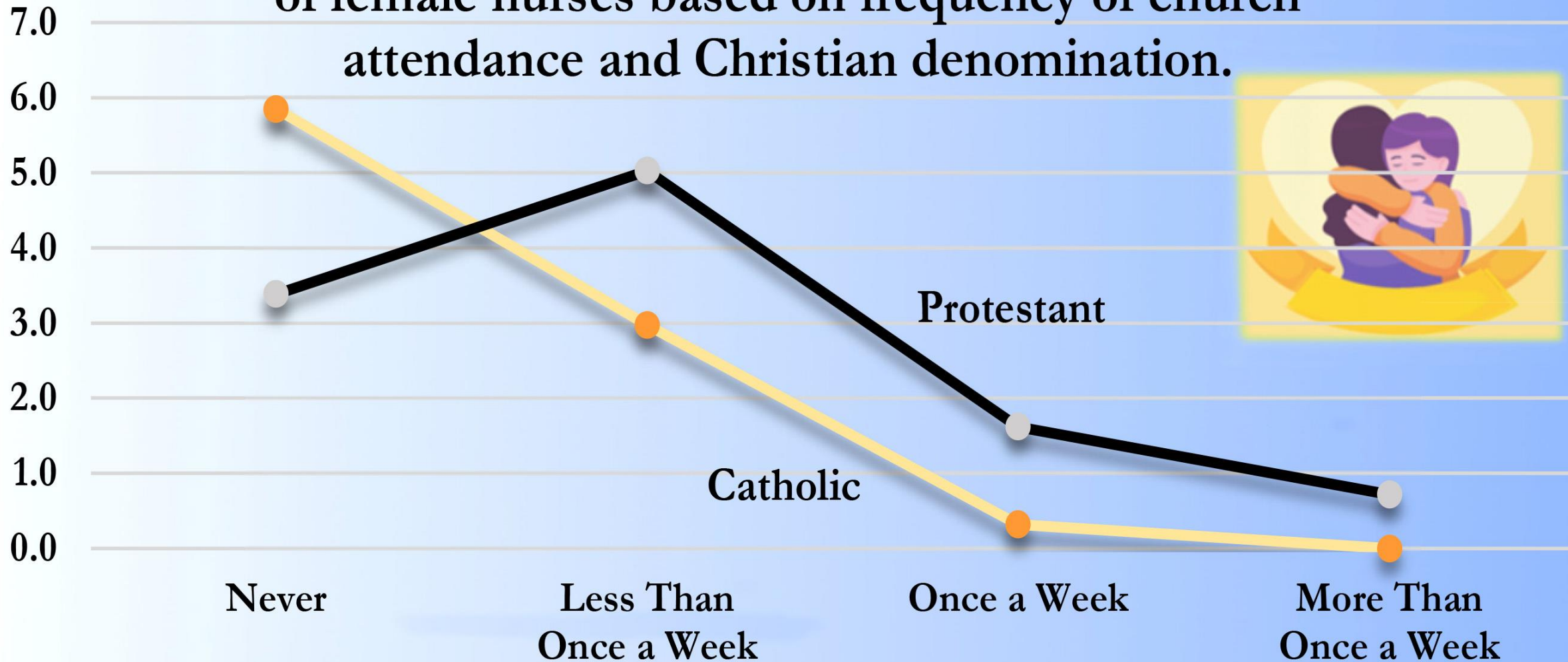
- In late 2020 after the start of Covid, a Gallup survey found that the number of people who deemed their mental health as being “excellent” dropped substantially from the previous year.
- True for nearly every demographic.
- Only exception was weekly churchgoers.



Suicide Incidence

of female nurses based on frequency of church attendance and Christian denomination.

Per 100K

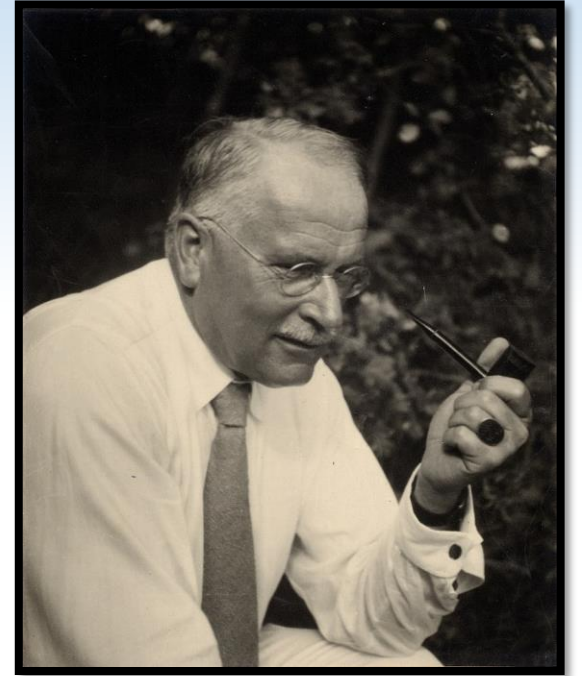


Incidence from 1996-2010 based on church attendance in 1996. Source: VanderWeele et al., "Association Between Religious Service Attendance and Lower Suicide Rates Among U.S. Women," *JAMA Psychiatry*, Aug. 2016.

Carl Jung, 1875-1961

“Among all my patients in the second half of life—that is to say, over thirty-five—there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life.

It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook.”



“Spiritual But Not Religious”

- Missing out on the benefits of communal worship, which is key to better wellness.
 - Communal prayer, communion, lectoring, ushering, choir singing, youth groups, volunteering, etc.
- Avoiding the responsibilities, obligations, commandments, and intellectual and moral discipline of organized religion.



Video: Mairead's testimony – "From New Age to Jesus"



Churchgoing Enhances Life Outcomes

Churchgoers are less prone to:

- depression and anxiety
- alcohol and drug abuse, or unethical or criminal behavior

More prone to:

- happier and more stable marriages
- more well-adjusted kids, better grades
- higher educational attainment and higher lifetime earnings

The Perils of Lukewarm Religiosity

Percent of people who have ever been diagnosed with depression, based on religious practice.



22.0%
20.0%
18.0%
16.0%
14.0%
12.0%
10.0%



15.6%

**Religious/Weekly
Church Attenders**



18.7%

**Nonreligious/
Never Attenders**



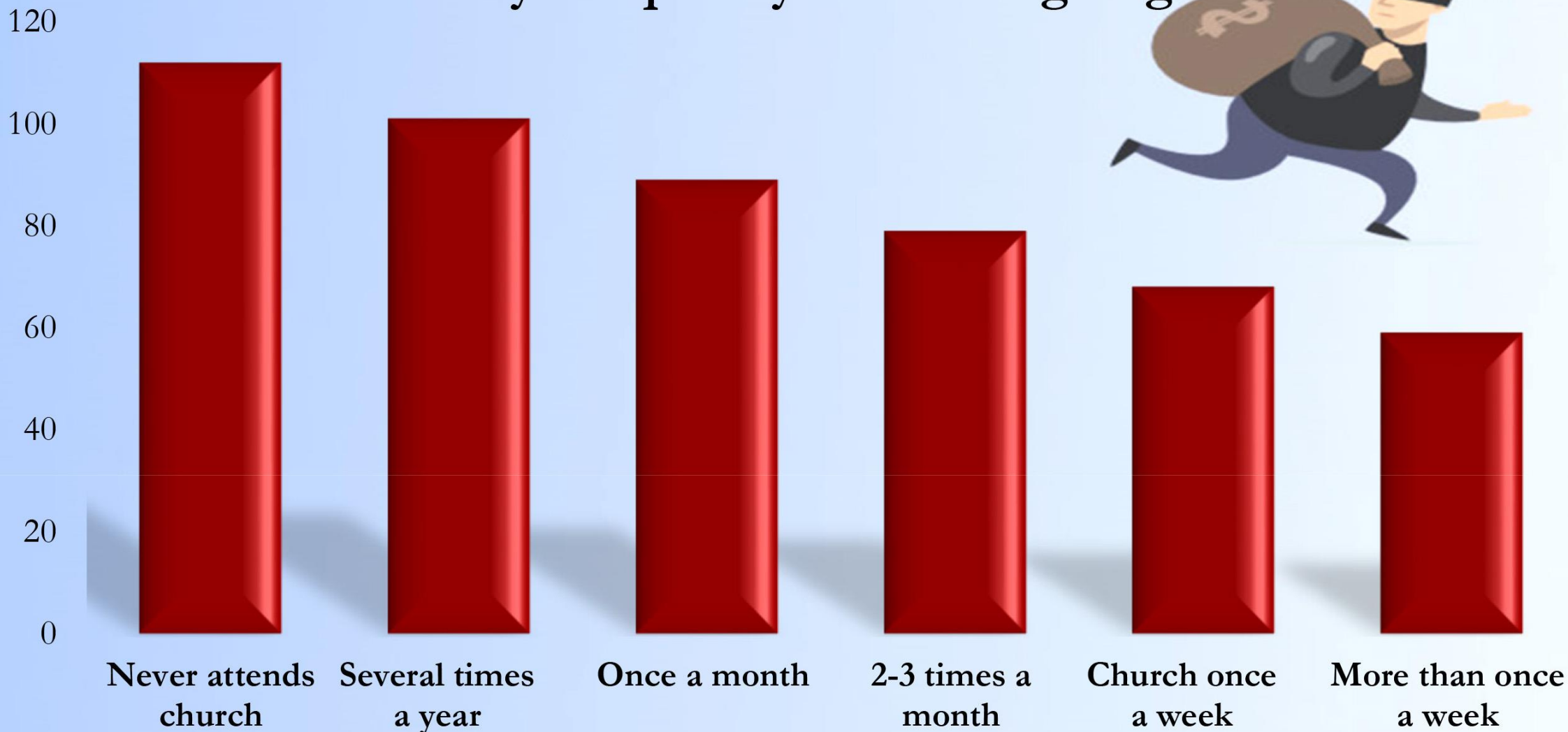
20.4%

Moderately Religious

Source: Gallup

Relative Probability of Committing a Crime By Frequency of Churchgoing

Composite
Crime Scale



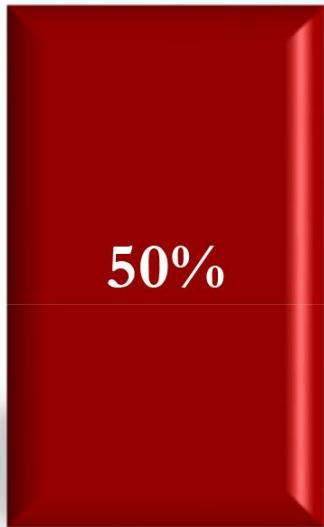
Source: Johnson and Siegel, "The Great Escape: How Religion Alters the Delinquent Behavior of High-Risk Adolescents," Baylor ISR, 2008.

Divorce Rate

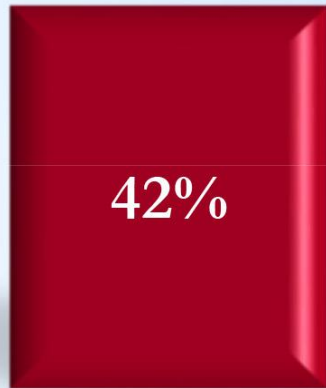
Based on religious affiliation and frequency of churchgoing.



70%
65%
60%
55%
50%
45%
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%



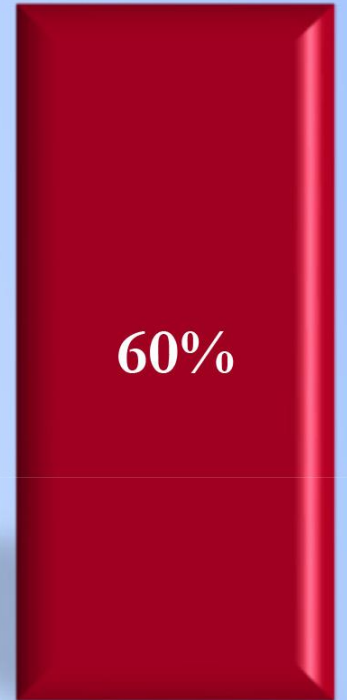
Religiously Unaffiliated



Christians Overall



Churchgoing Evangelicals



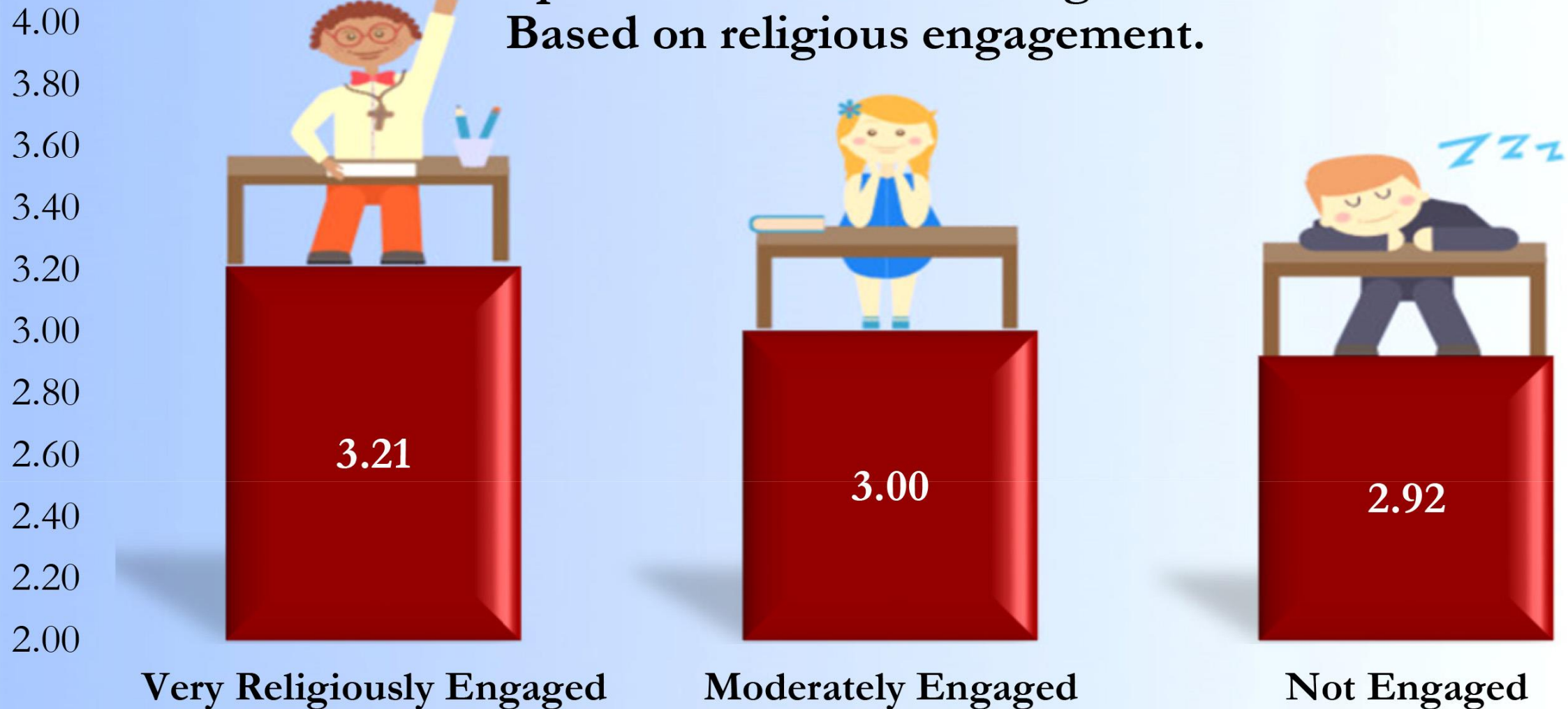
Seldom-Attending Evangelicals

Source: "Research Disputes 'Facts' on Christian Divorces," *The Christian Century*, 3/14/11.

Grade Point Average

...of public school students ages 13-17.

Based on religious engagement.



Source: Ilana Horwitz, "The Abider-Avoider Achievement Gap: The Association Between Religiosity and GPA in Public Schools", working paper, March 2018.

Received a College Degree

By Frequency of Churchgoing

35%

30%

25%

20%

15%

10%

5%

0%



32%

Weekly or more



27%

Monthly or more



19%

Less than monthly



14%

Never

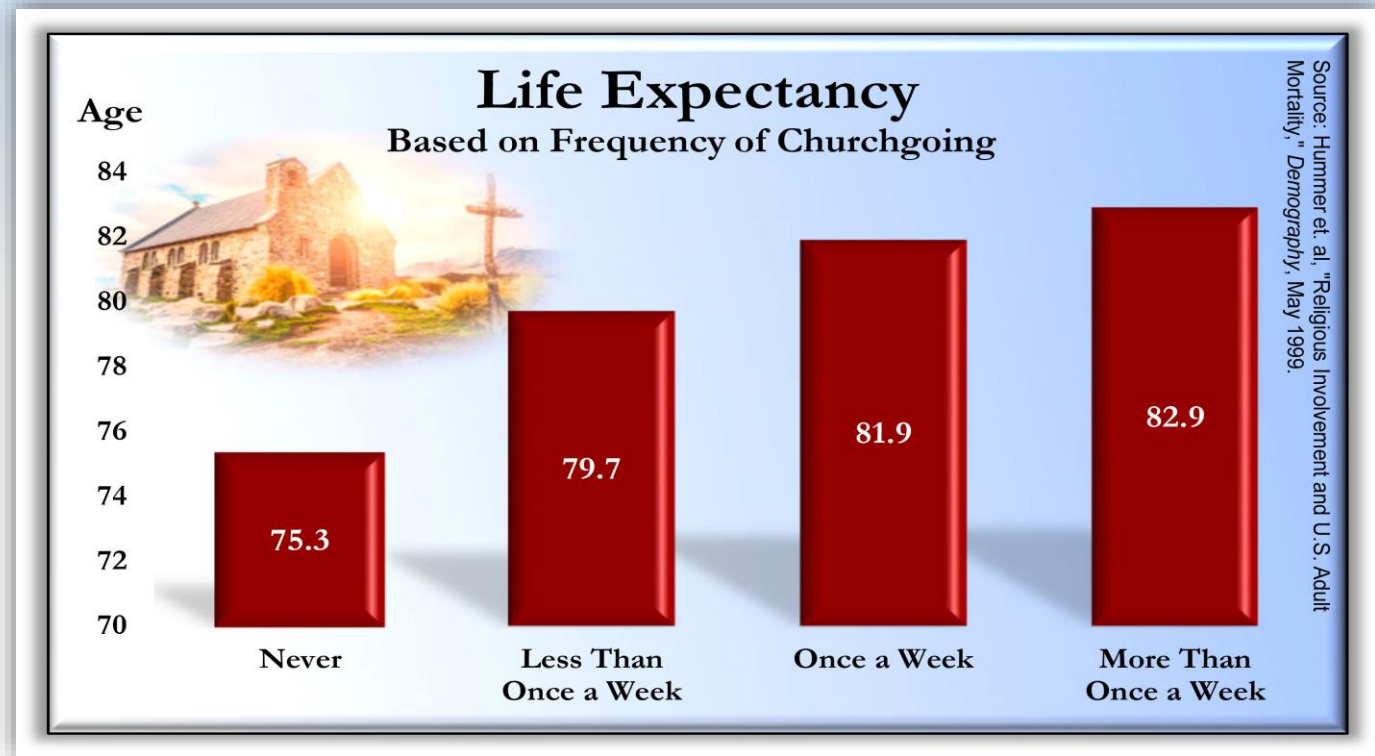
Source: "Effects of Religious Practice on Education," Marriage and Religion Research Institute

Churchgoing Enhances Physical Health



Churchgoing Enhances Physical Health

- Churchgoers live an average of six to seven years longer than non-churchgoers.



- Reduces the likelihood of many ailments including cancer, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, asthma, emphysema, tuberculosis, allergies, and diseases of the liver, kidney, and digestive system.

Death Rate After Heart Surgery

Of 232 Patients at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center.
Based on Religiosity.

% of
Patients
Who Died

14%

12%

10%

8%

6%

4%

2%

0%



“Not at All,” “Slightly,”
or “Fairly” Religious



0%

“Deeply” Religious

Source: Oxman et al., "Lack of Social Participation or Religious Strength and Comfort as Risk Factors for Death After Cardiac Surgery in the Elderly", *Psychosomatic Medicine*, Jan-Feb. 1995.

Religion and Your Doctor

- The positive effects of church are so strong that more and more physicians and psychotherapists recommend faith-based therapy to their patients.
- Often results in faster recovery rates.



Video: overview of positive outcomes



Reasons Why Churchgoing Enhances Mental and Physical Health

How does church produce so many health benefits?

- Churchgoers often view their bodies as a temple of the Holy Spirit.
- They're less likely to smoke and drink, and more likely to eat right.



Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

1 Corinthians 6:19

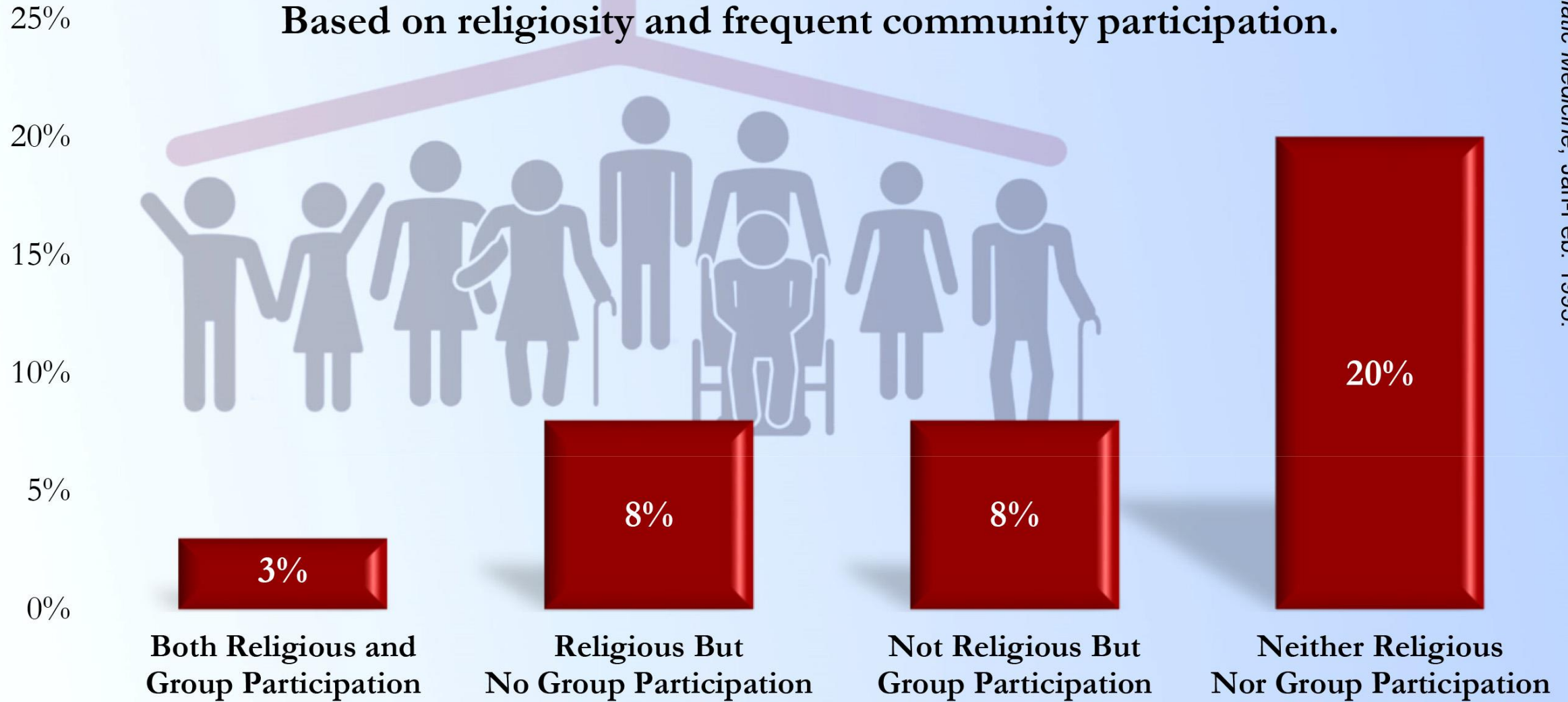
Social interaction and camaraderie at church

- This is proven to be good for both mental and physical health.
- By contrast, social isolation raises stress hormones and inflammation, which boost the risk of disease.



Percent Who Died After Heart Surgery

...within six months. Out of 232 patients at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center.
Based on religiosity and frequent community participation.

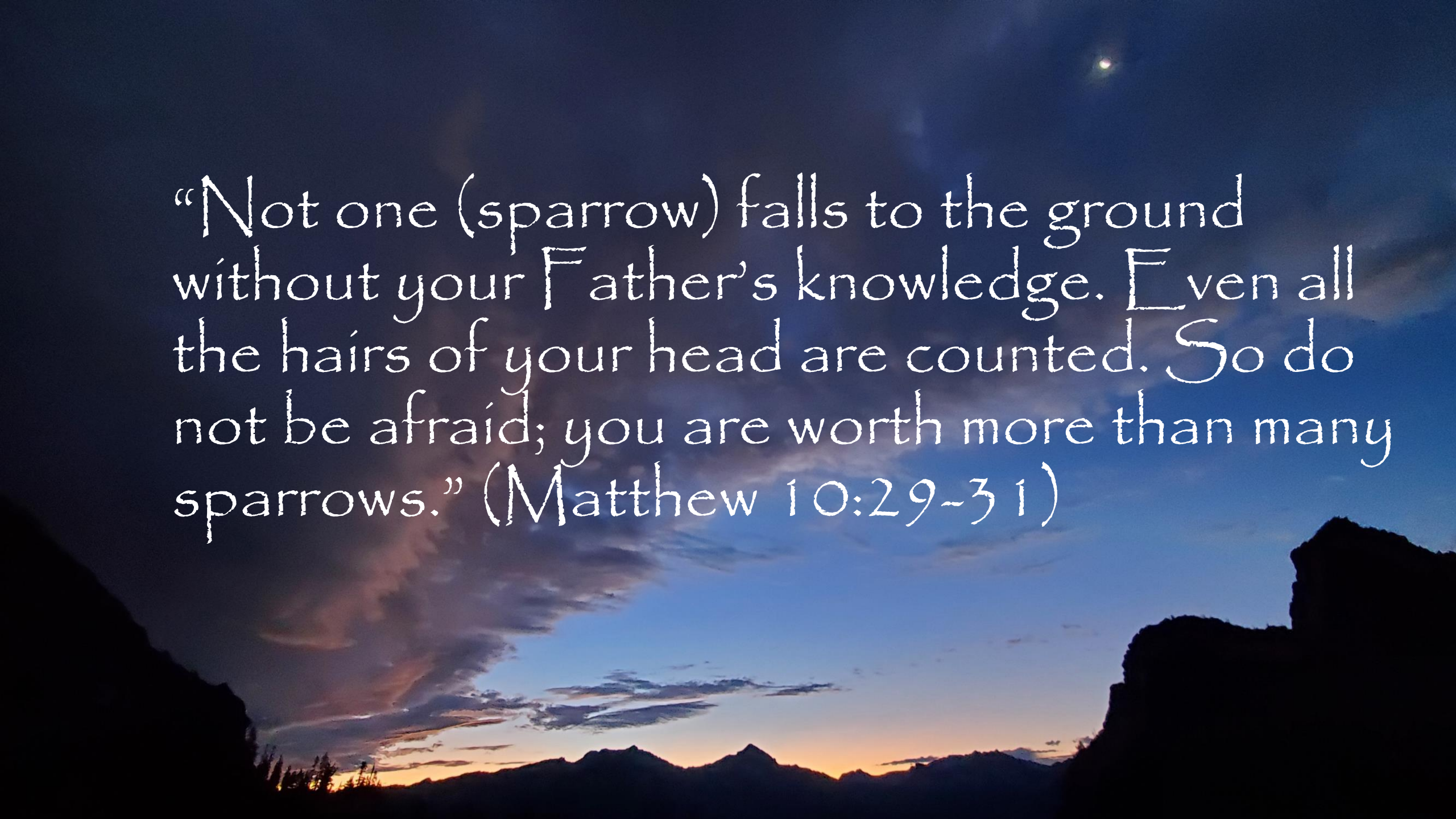


Source: Oxman et al., "Lack of Social Participation or Religious Strength and Comfort as Risk Factors for Death After Cardiac Surgery in the Elderly", *Psychosomatic Medicine*, Jan-Feb. 1995.

Religion instills a strong sense of meaning and purpose

- ...that we are deeply loved by our eternal Creator and that the present world is but a shadow of the eternal world.



A sunset over a mountain range. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, with a bright star visible in the upper right. The mountains are silhouetted against the horizon.

“Not one (sparrow) falls to the ground without your Father’s knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10:29-31)

Reasons Why Churchgoing Enhances Mental and Physical Health



“One of the greatest lies we buy into is that our lives are without meaning....Today, let's write a new script. Repeat to yourself: I am Sacred. The God of the universe dwells within me. He desires to transform me and those around me. By his mercy and grace, I am his beloved son/daughter and there is nothing that can separate me from his love...”

- Chris Stefanick, Catholic Speaker and Author

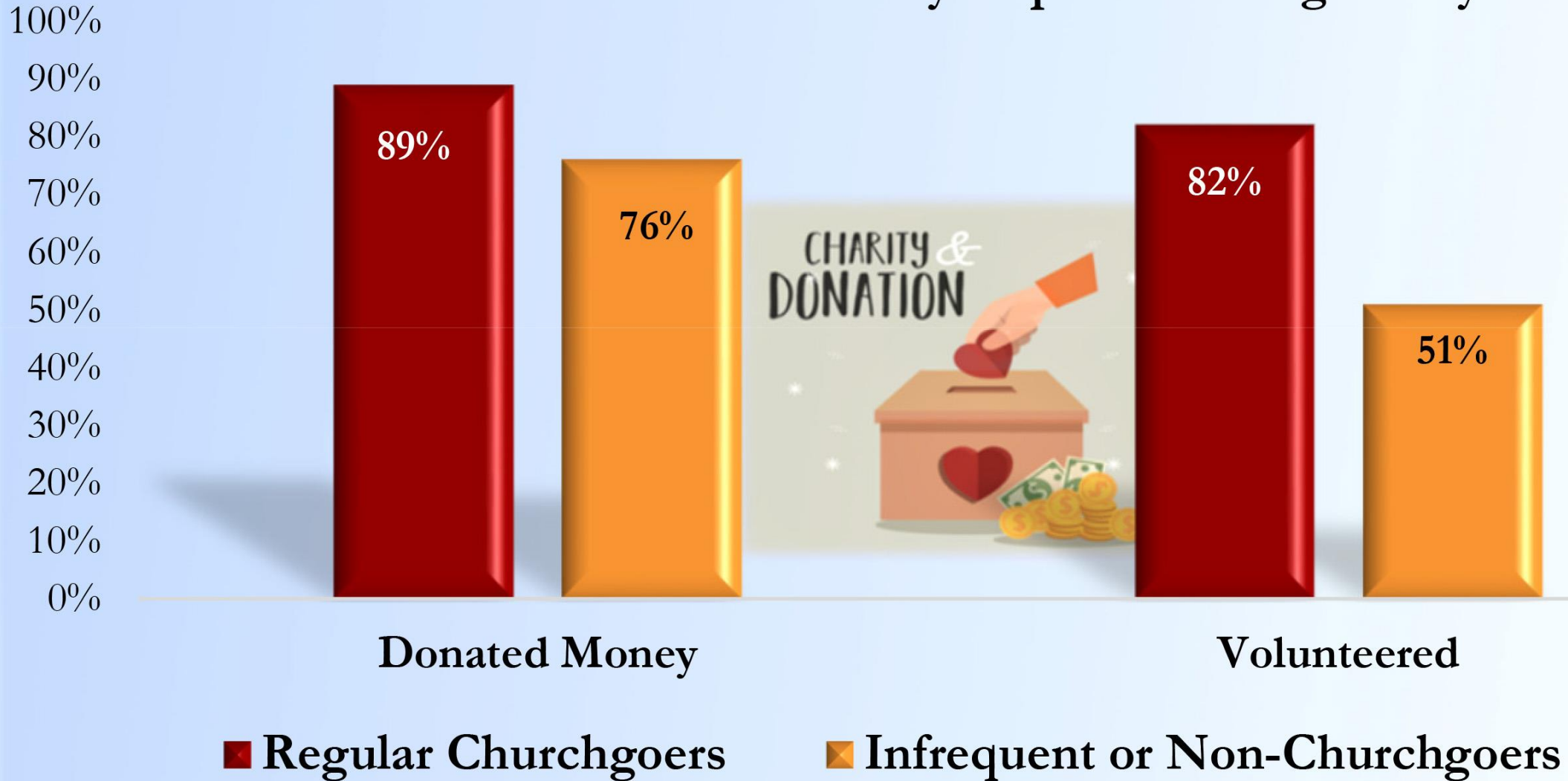
A focus on others rather than self.

- Volunteering for charitable activities is good for mind and body.
- Thanks to a sense of accomplishment, self-worth, meaning and purpose.



Charitable Giving and Volunteering

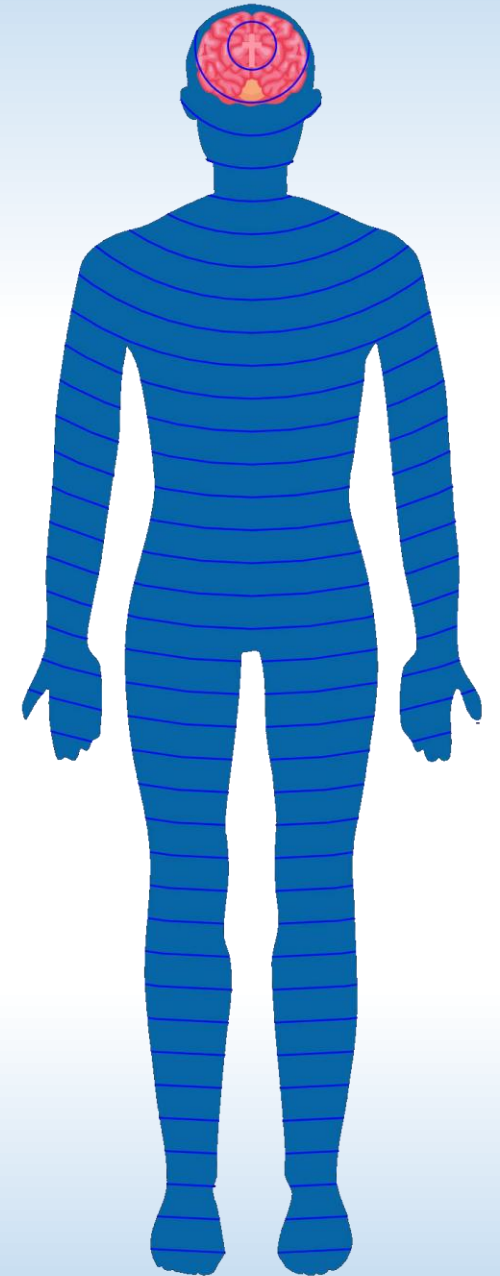
Percent of those who did so within year prior to being surveyed.



Source: Gallup

Positive beliefs and attitudes

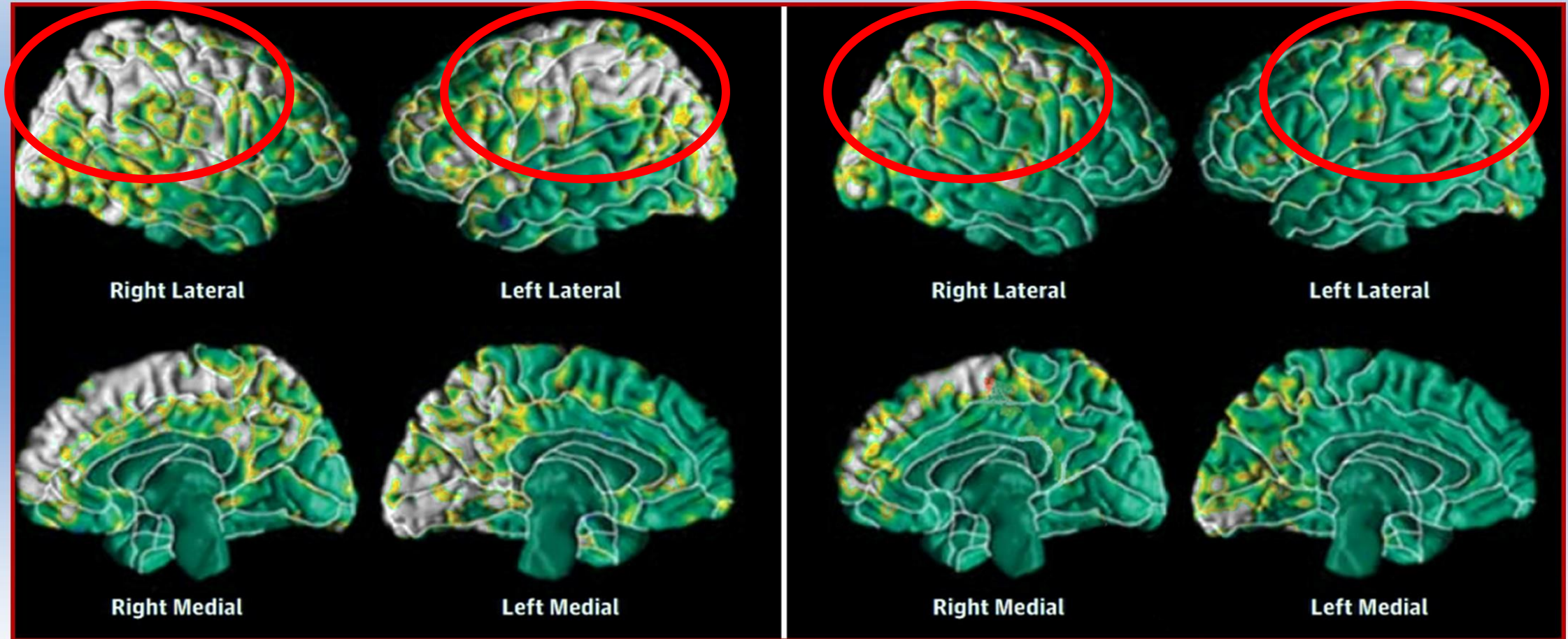
- Such as hope, trust in God, forgiveness, gratitude, and self-discipline.
- These influence the production of “molecules of emotion” – hormones and enzymes that affect blood pressure, immune system, etc.



MRI Brain Scans of Two People of Differing Religiosity

Composite of 103 study participants.

Lighter areas indicate reduced cortical thickness, associated with higher risk of neurodegenerative and psychiatric disorders.



Religion Not Important

Religion Very Important

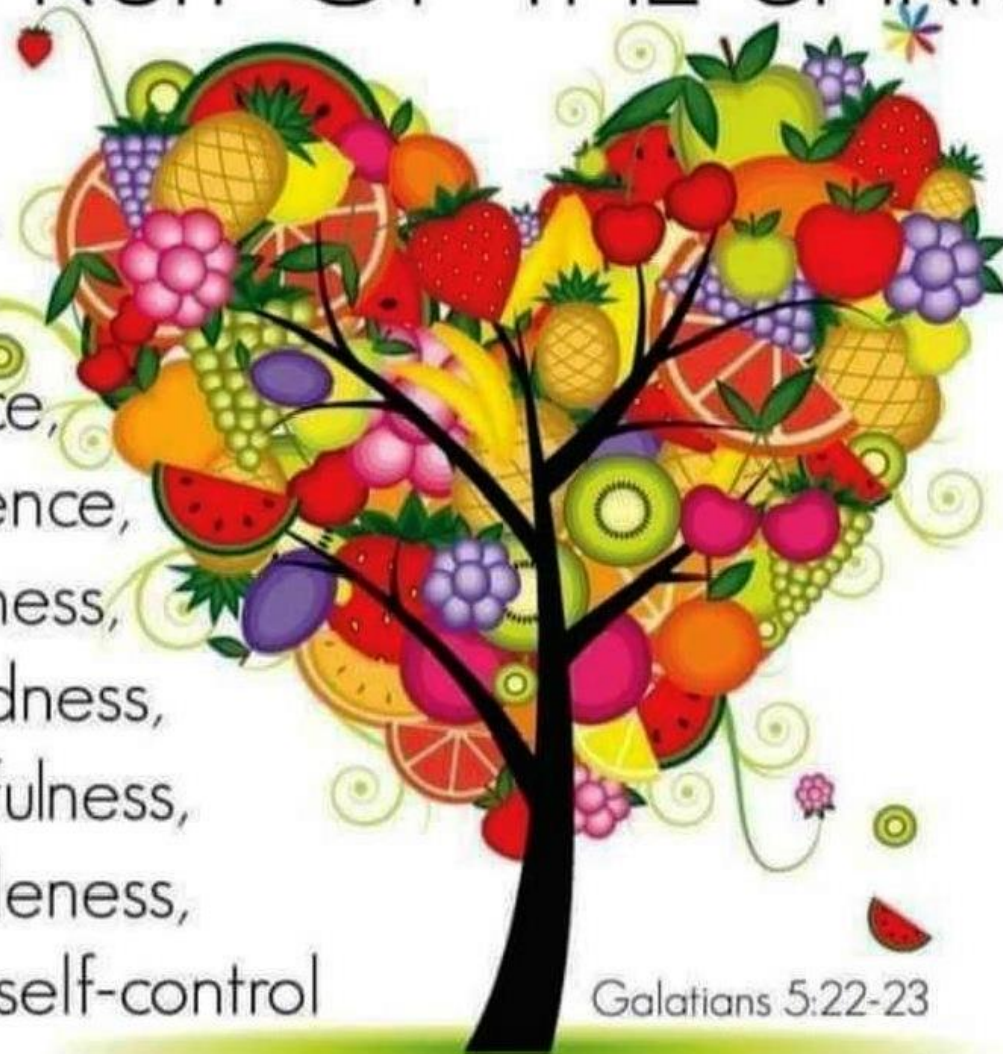
Direct graces from God.

- If you praise and worship Him, He's bound to return the favor.
- Intercessory prayer studies show that prayer really works.



FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

love,
joy,
peace,
patience,
kindness,
goodness,
faithfulness,
gentleness,
and self-control



Galatians 5:22-23

Reasons Why Churchgoing Enhances Mental and Physical Health

- “Confession sometimes has a truly redeeming effect. The tremendous feeling of relief which usually follows a confession can be ascribed to the readmission of the lost sheep into the human community. His moral isolation and seclusion, which were so difficult to bear, cease. Herein lies the chief psychological value of confession.”

- Carl Jung, 1875-1961

- “If my patients went to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, I’d lose 99% of them.”

Video: summary of reasons behind positive outcomes





We need the Church
to help us achieve
eternal happiness.

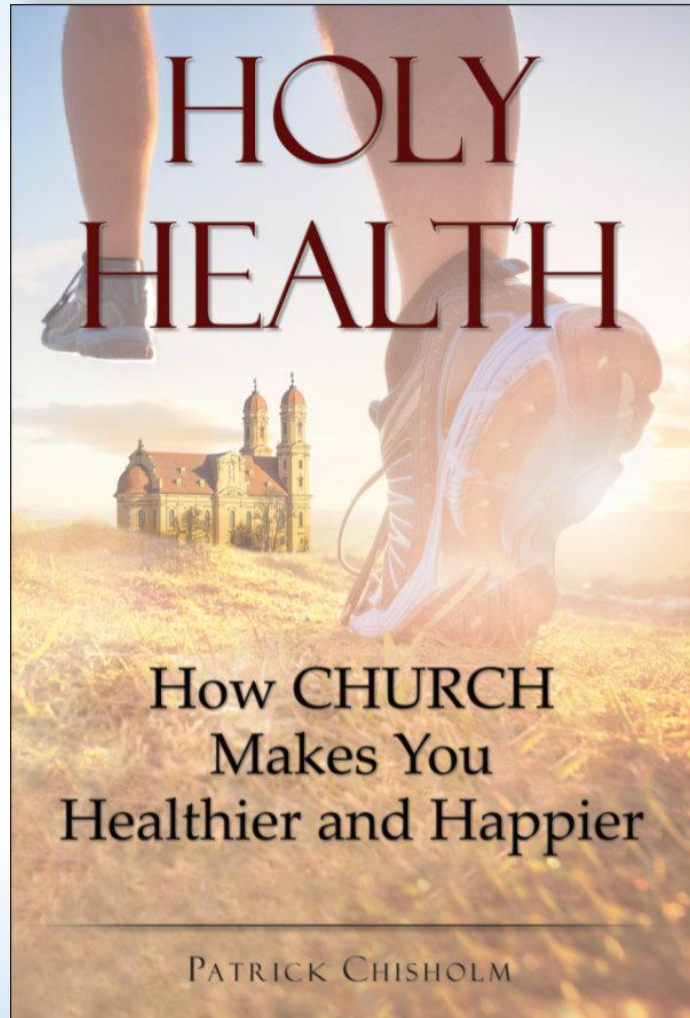
And earthly happiness.



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Learn more about this fascinating topic...



Draws from more than 250 scholarly studies attesting to the mental and physical health benefits of church and faith, with a Catholic focus.

Great gift for family & friends who don't go to Mass.

Available at Amazon, etc.

“Amazing book”

- Jesse Romero, Catholic author, radio show host, and evangelist

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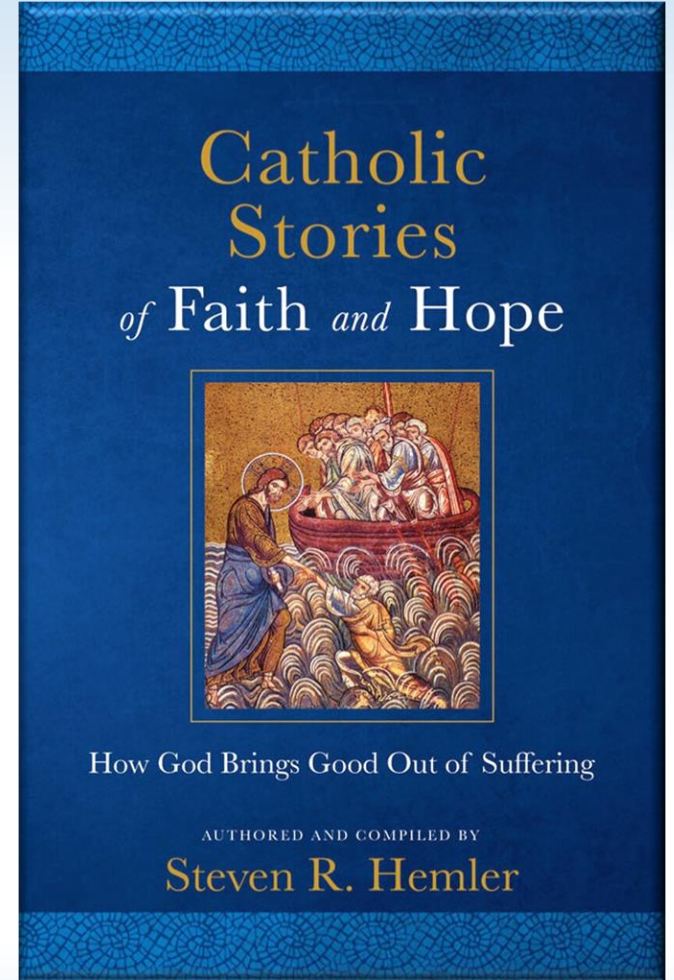
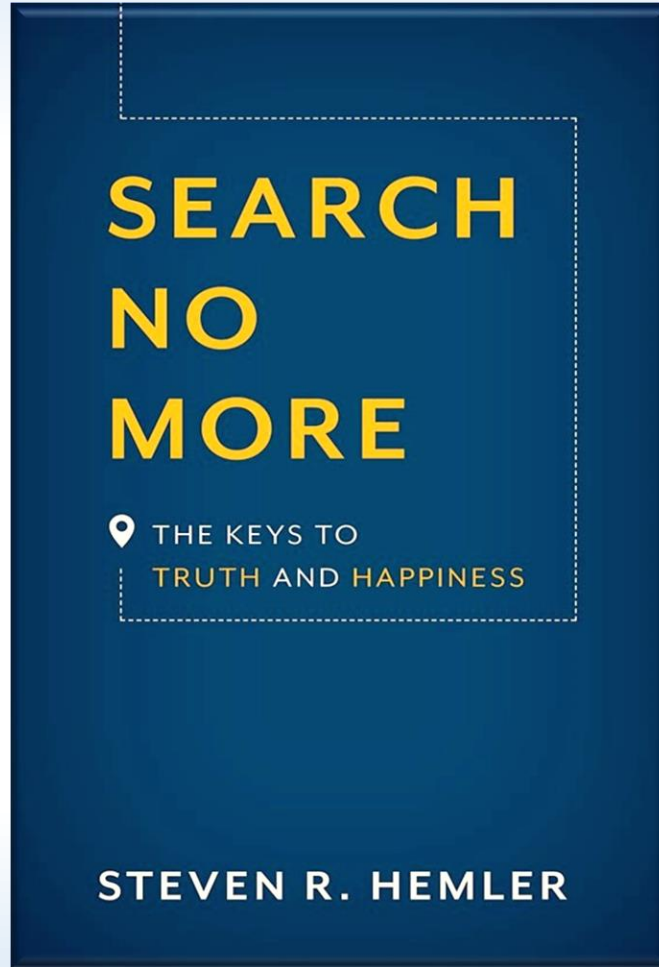
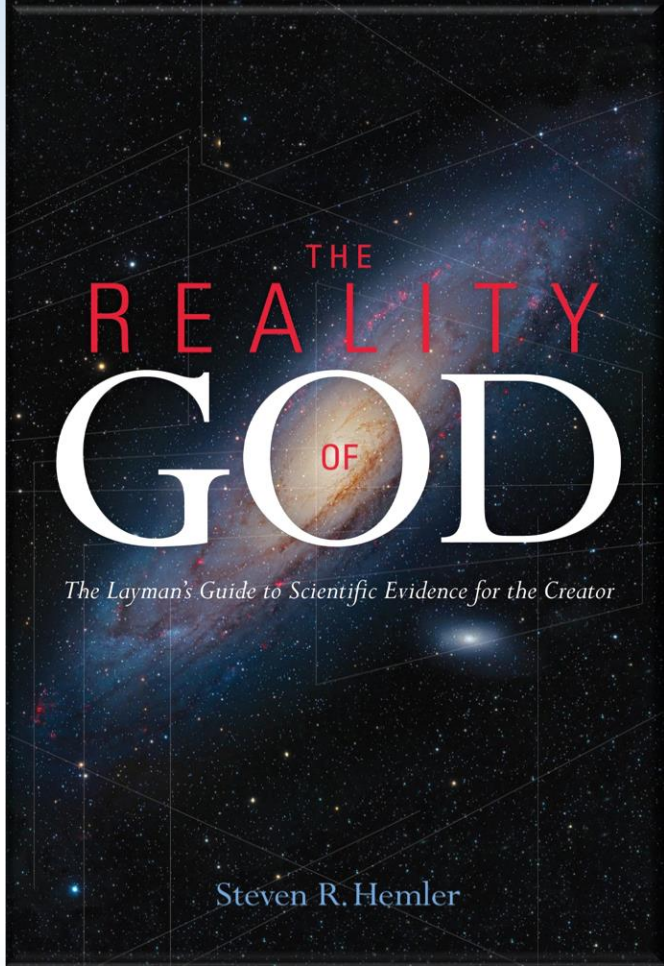


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