

# Harvard Researchers Recognize Benefits of Church Attendance

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A recent study conducted by researchers from Harvard University found that deaths from despair are significantly less common among healthcare workers who regularly attend religious services.<sup>1</sup> A “death from despair” was defined as one related to alcohol, drugs, or suicide.

They summarized their findings in the journal *JAMA Psychiatry*:

In this cohort study of 66 492 female registered nurses and 43 141 male health care professionals in the US, attendance at religious services at least once per week was associated with a 68% lower hazard of death from despair among women and a 33% lower hazard among men compared with never attendance.<sup>1</sup>

As with every study, these findings are limited. This report considered only healthcare workers and did not break down the findings by religion. Nor did it consider the difference between churches that hold to the Bible as the inerrant Word of God and those that do not.

No study can account for the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. There is no way to tell if church attendance leads to a lesser risk of “death by despair” or if the kind of people who attend church are also less likely to commit suicide or abuse alcohol or drugs. Regardless, it is encouraging for a secular study to note benefits of church attendance.

Bible-believing Christians understand that God created people to have a relationship with Him and that there are physical as well as spiritual benefits to following God’s commands. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, King David wrote, “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.”<sup>2</sup> This means any instructions God gives are morally just.<sup>3</sup> Obedience to them transforms lives and produces joy.

God has instructed believers to participate in the regular gathering of the church body.<sup>4</sup> Data published in *JAMA Psychiatry* suggests that joy is indeed found in obeying this command. Even secular people can recognize this benefit.

From the beginning God declared, “It is not good that man should be alone.”<sup>5</sup> He created woman for this reason. In much the same, it is not good for a Christian to be alone in his or her faith. One of the purposes for which Jesus established the church was the edification and mutual encouragement of believers.<sup>6</sup>

As many churches ponder how they may safely resume meeting in person in light of the coronavirus pandemic, believers should strive to maintain fellowship with their fellow church members and long for the day they are able to see each other face to face once more.

## References

1. Chen Y, et. al. [Religious Service Attendance and Deaths Related to Drugs, Alcohol, and Suicide Among US Health Care Professionals](#). *JAMA Psychiatry*. Published on jamanetwork.com May 06, 2020, accessed May 14, 2020.
2. Psalm 19:8.
3. The Hebrew word *piqqudim*, translated “statutes” in [Psalm 19:8](#) comes from the root PQD, meaning to “visit” or “appoint.” God’s statutes are His instructions, the things He has appointed for people to do. These statutes are “right” (Hebrew *yashar*), a term that indicates they are just and morally upright.
4. Hebrews 10:25.
5. Genesis 2:17.
6. Matthew 16:18; [Hebrews 10:24-25](#).

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