

Faith on Prescription

By Joseph Tkach

Some atheists claim that belief in God is immature and subjective. They say that religion is for the hesitant, the guilt-ridden, the excessively timid, and those lacking clear convictions with which to face life. Some of these atheists even see religion as a cause of mental and physical illness. But a recent study done by the British charity, Christian Medical Fellowship, known as the CMF, showed otherwise.

Research suggests that faith is associated with longer life and a wide range of physical and mental health benefits.

Drawing on evidence from more than 1200 studies and 400 reviews, this study showed that, far from being bad for health, being a practicing Christian can have significant benefits to both physical and mental well-being.

Moreover, evidence from these studies and reviews has shown an association between a life of faith and a number of positive health benefits, including: protection from illness, coping with illness, and faster recovery from it.

In fact, of all the studies reviewed, 81 percent showed benefit and only four percent showed harm. The four percent were among religions who refuse vaccination and blood transfusions.

So what particular health benefits were identified in the report?

Here are a few:

- increased well-being, happiness and life satisfaction,

- lower rates of depression,
- less anxiety (and related illnesses),
- lower rates of alcohol and drug abuse, and
- better adaptation to bereavement.

One study of 21,204 adults showed that those who attended church regularly had a life expectancy up to fourteen years longer than those who did not.

The report goes on to suggest that modern doctors need to listen to their patients, 'who typically are more religious than their carers [caregivers]'. It suggests that doctors support spiritual care, because at a time of illness, spiritual issues often rise to the surface—questions of personal worth, mortality, and place in the world—questions only faith can answer.

There are strong links between emotional and physical health.

Even though faith can have a very positive influence on health, Christians should not claim that their faith is a guarantee of good health and well-being. That is not always the case. The gospel is not a 'name it and claim it' message about health and wealth. The gospel is about spiritual health and well-being.



Christians should not claim that belief in God is a guarantee of good health. But they can point out that the claim some atheists make about belief in God being bad for your health is simply not borne out by the facts.

The CMF report concluded that in contrast to the idea that the Christian faith is bad for your health, research suggests that faith is associated with longer life and a wide range of physical and mental health benefits.

This is a transcript of a weekly 'Speaking of Life' radio programme by Joseph Tkach, president of Grace Communion International.

For more information visit www.gci.org.