



## Are You Suffering from Anxiety, Depression, or Despair? By Karen Sue Nyquist

1. **Are You Suffering from Anxiety? Depression? Despair? -** Have you been trying to cope with this on your own? Going to therapy? Reaching out to loved ones? Are you pleased with your progress?

You are not alone. “Depression is an issue that has become a major problem across America ... Despite therapists’ best efforts, it seems that fighting the depression epidemic is an uphill battle” (1). “Depression does not only affect a person's mood and emotions. Long-term, it can also affect their body in ways that may be serious” (4). “There is good news – the solution may be found in the church” (1). Numerous studies concur that participating in **regular church services** can be beneficial to mental health. “A recent study conducted by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health showed evidence that people who **attended church services regularly suffered less depression**” (1).

2. **Are You Struggling with Anxiety and Depression?** - “Even if people are suffering from anxiety instead of full out depression, many of the effects can be the same. However, if the study holds true, being a faithful churchgoer can heal anxiety and depression” (1). Anxiety can be a forerunner of depression, depression can lead to despair. Despair can sometimes lead to death. Death?

3. **Have You Heard of Deaths of Despair?** - “Despair is something that can confront anyone dealing with **severe difficulties** ... This can include “struggling with excessive demands and burnout, or to anyone **facing loss**” (2). Most people addicted to drugs or alcohol turn to these substances “because they’re trying to cope with some unhappy aspect of their life” (1). Then it is easy to get addicted which only increases the depression. Unfortunately, this often can lead to death. “There are three categories of **deaths of despair: suicide, drug overdose,** and deaths attributed to **alcoholism** (alcohol liver disease)” (1). (2) - (“If you or someone you know are suffering from depression that is serious enough to contemplate taking drugs or committing suicide, you should probably seek professional help” (1). “However, ... **attending religious services could change your spirit enough to spark some positivity in your life.** You don’t have anything to lose by giving it a try” (1). Jesus said, “Come to Me, all **you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ... My burden is light**” (Matthew 11:28-30). “...regular church attendance... brings about better **physical and mental health**” (3).

4. **What are the Benefits of Regular Church Participation?** - “The spirituality that a person develops from attending church services can **help a person get past all the bad things** that have held them back in life” (1). “The study authors noted that religious participation may serve as an important **antidote to despair** and an asset for sustaining a **sense of hope and meaning**. They also wrote that religion may be associated with **strengthened psychosocial resilience** by fostering a **sense of peace** and **positive outlook**, and promoting **social connectedness**” (2). They report of “having a **greater purpose in life** and **developing more self-control** — both mechanisms by which service attendance might affect health” (3). “Church attendance is correlated with **longer life** and a **sense of meaning**.” (3) “... those who attend services are **more optimistic** and have **lower rates of depression** ... Attendance **protects against suicide**” (3). While there, they “... hear messages of **faith or hope**” (3). In one study focusing on adolescents, “**positive effects**” of church attendance “**were strongest** for the individuals presenting **the most severe symptoms of depression**, who are often hardest to treat” (5). With all these benefits available, attending church is definitely worth trying out. “Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have **it more abundantly**” (John 10:10).



**5. Can't I Just Meditate or Pray Alone?** - Individual meditation and prayer are definitely beneficial but ... "Something about **the communal religious experience and participation** matters. **Something powerful appears** to take place there, and enhances health. It is something quite different from solitary spirituality" (3). Jesus said, "For where **two or three are gathered** together in My name, **I am there in the midst of them**" (Matthew 18:20). The Bible says God, "**You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy;**" (Psalm 16:11). "Do not sorrow, for **the joy of the Lord is your strength**" (Nehemiah 8:10). "Attending religious services has been shown to... **elevate one's sense of meaning, and to expand one's social network**" (3).



**6. What Does the Bible Say About Participating in Church?** - It encourages having a loving devotion to God. "Jesus said to him, 'You shall **love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**' This is *the* first and great commandment" (Matthew 27:37-38). When we go to church we can feel "**the comfort of the Holy Spirit,**" (Acts 9:31). We can **experience God's love, be taught God's Word, learn about Jesus Christ, gain wisdom, sing with thanksgiving in our hearts,** (Colossians 3:16), and **build our faith** (Romans 10:17).



The Bible also encourages us to **love each other**. Jesus said, "And *the* second *is* like it: '**You shall love your neighbor as yourself**'" (Matthew 27:39). We regularly go to church so that we can learn to love and care for one another. This is a process of growing in love. At church, we **fellowship with one another** (Galatians 6:2), and **grow together in love** (Ephesians 4:16). We learn to **be considerate of others** and **put our love into action**. "And let us consider one another in order to **stir up love and good works,**" (Hebrews 10:24).

**7. Points to Ponder Purposely** - "Where else today do we find a **community with a shared moral and spiritual vision, a sense of accountability,** wherein the central task of members is to **love and care for one another?** The combination of the **teachings, the relationships** and the **spiritual practices** — over time, week after week, taken together — **gradually alters behavior, creates meaning, alleviates loneliness, and shapes a person in ways too numerous to document**" (3).

"**I WAS GLAD WHEN THEY SAID TO ME, 'LET US GO INTO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD'**" (Psalm 122:1).

- (1) "Harvard Study Links Church Attendance and Reduced Depression," <https://www.powerofpositivity.com> > church-attendance...
- (2) "Regularly attending religious services associated with lower risk of deaths of despair," 5/6/2020, >
- (3) "Religion may be a miracle drug:" Column - USA Today, Tyler J. VanderWeele and John Siniff, <https://www.usatoday.com> > opinion > 2016/10/28 > rel.
- (4) "The Effects of Depression on the Body and Physical Health," 7/9/2018, <https://www.medicinalnewstoday.com>.
- (5) "The Science is In: Faith Can Be Effective Against Adolescent Depression," <https://www.americanmagazine.org> > faith > 2019/08/19

**8. Are You Ready to Commit to Attending Church to Improve Your Life?** - Or are you ready to work on convincing a depressed, self-isolated friend or family member to go with you? It might require going to several churches until you find the right one. You can pray now, ask God for help. If you're serious, He'll lead you to the right one. **Suggested Prayer:** "Dear God, please lead me to a good church where I can feel Your presence and they teach the Bible. A church where I'll be learning to love You, becoming more positive, hopeful, grateful, and learning to love and help others. I'm asking in Jesus' name. Amen."

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**NationTakers Ministries** - 856 Cabrillo St., San Francisco, CA 94118

Mail P.O. Box 27475, San Francisco, CA 94127 1(415) 337-7027

[info@nationtakers.com](mailto:info@nationtakers.com)

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