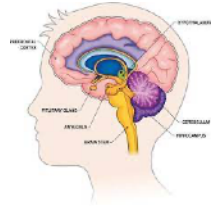




## Scientific Proof - A Relationship with God Can Improve Emotional and Mental Health!

By Karen Sue Nyquist



When the Lord God created us, He “wired us” to have a loving relationship with Him. Neurotheology is a new field of science devoted to understanding what happens in our brains when we engage in religious experiences or practices. The Bible is God’s instruction manual that teaches us **how to live in order to have good mental and emotional health. Now science tells us why these behaviors work!** Let’s look at the benefits of living the way God created us to live. - **The Bible says** - “For I will restore health to you and heal you of your wounds,” says the Lord” (Jeremiah 30:17). **“He heals the brokenhearted”** (Psalm 147:3).

**1. Believing In and Loving God** - “If people have a **loving, kind perception of God and feel God is supportive**, they seem to experience benefits,” But if, “you tend to see God as punitive, threatening or unreliable, then that’s not very helpful to your health.”<sup>(2)</sup> - <https://www.livescience.com › 52197-religion-mental-heal...> ... “A large body of research ... **has tied religious beliefs with positive outcomes for mental health** ... a 2005 study of older adults in the San Francisco Bay area found that **being religious served as a buffer against depression...**”<sup>(2)</sup> “In addition, a 2013 study found that patients who are being treated for **mental-health issues such as depression or anxiety responded better to treatment if they believed in God.**”<sup>(2)</sup> A “connection to a greater power or truth can give you a **sense of purpose and meaning** ...”<sup>(3)</sup> - <https://www.everydayhealth.com > power-of-prayer.> - **The Bible says** - “Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established” (2 Chronicles 20:20). “And whoever trusts in the Lord, **happy is he**” (Proverbs 16:20). “**God is love**” (1 John 4:8). God says, “**Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you**” (Jeremiah 31:3). “You shall **love the Lord your God** with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5). Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1).

**2. Daily Positive Prayers** - “**When prayer elicits feelings of love and compassion**, there is a release of **serotonin and dopamine** ... Serotonin has a direct impact on your mood, and not having enough serotonin has been linked to depression. Dopamine, on the other hand, is associated with **reward and motivation.**”<sup>(1)</sup> - <https://www.success.com > unlocking-the-power-of-prayer> “That **peace**, that **sense of meaning and connection** that happens with prayer is what is positive.”<sup>(3)</sup> “... 12 minutes of daily focused prayer over an 8-week period can change the brain to such an extent that it can be measured on a brain scan. This type of prayer increases activity in brain areas associated with **social interaction, compassion, and sensitivity to others.** It also increases frontal lobe activity as **focus and intentionality increase.**”<sup>(4)</sup> - <https://renewingallthings.com › Spiritual Health>. “It ... specifically **enhances our social awareness and empathy and helps us love our neighbor.**”<sup>(5)</sup> - <https://www.westmont.edu › how-faith-and-prayer-benefit> - **The Bible says** - “**Rejoice always, pray without ceasing**, in everything **give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). “In all your ways acknowledge Him (*pray to the Lord God*), And He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:6).



**3. Worshiping God** - Worship - “Reverent honor and homage paid to God” (Oxford Dictionary). “Krause and Hayward (2014) found religious music to **promote a strong sense of connectedness with other people.**”<sup>(6)</sup> - <https://thebftonline.com > 2022/03/06 > seven-minutes-of...> “Liedke’s (2018) thesis found that when we worship God, there is an increase in BDNF, which is a neurotransmitter that helps us **grow healthy brain cells.** Liedke notes: ‘Every morning, we wake up with 300 million more brain cells. When we worship, gamma waves are created in our brain that **can actually help us feel the presence of God.**’ Psalm 22:3 says that God inhabits the praises of his people and we actually **get a physical boost** as these gamma waves fire in our brains while we worship.”<sup>(6)</sup> “**Gamma waves** do more than just make us feel better, they actually **increase our intelligence**, too. Research has shown that as you worship, you **increase in wisdom** and there’s an **increase in your capacity to understand the goodness of God. So your relationship with God deepens as you worship him.** As you worship, your brain is comprehending wisdom from the living Word helping grow your capacity to understand that God absolutely adores you. Interestingly, just seven minutes of worship every day will change your brain.”<sup>(6)</sup>



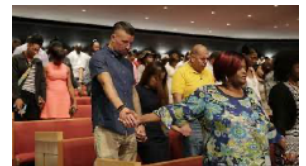
“An increase in the volume of the cingulate cortex or gyrus results in an increase of ... **empathetic thinking and feeling.** In essence, as the cingulate grows in volume and metabolic activity **you transform into a nicer, more forgiving and trustful person.**”<sup>(6)</sup> “Worship’s effects on the amygdala have also been well studied and demonstrates a wide range of effects

as a result of the hypoactivation or down-regulation to the fight or flight mechanism.” (6) “This hypoactivation (*or decrease*) also has measurable psychic effects, **measurable decreases in depression, anxiety, chronic pain and even post-traumatic stress** have been identified and can be traced back to one daily action, **worship**” (6) **“If you are battling depression or anxiety or loneliness, God wants to take away your despair and clothe you with praise and joy.”** (6) - **The Bible says** - God wants “To give them the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (*depression or despair*);” (Isaiah 61:3). That’s a great trade!



**4. Bible Reading** - Through studies, it was found that while reading the Bible, “three regions of the brain (*are*) the most active ... the frontal attention lobe, the medial prefrontal cortex, and the nucleus accumbens (*which*) all experience significant increases of activity and responsiveness” ... High amounts of dopamine were released through the body, meaning “you are more likely to be **more focused, motivated, and happy.**” (7 - <https://www.susanldavis.com/how-does-reading-the-bible-affect-your-brain/>). It was found that reading the Bible helps **“people cope with adversity”** and **“inhibits the negative impacts of stress** on an individual’s **hope in the future.**” (8 - (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>>...)). - **The Bible says** - “For the word of God *is* living and powerful (Hebrews 4:12) and it is true (John 17:17).

**5. Church Attendance and Participation** - “In 2002, Fiala published a scholarly article on the positive social support that church members receive.” The support “from the congregation, from church leadership, and from God ... **lowered depression and increased life satisfaction.**” This also results in ... **“a healthy spirituality in relationship to God.”** “So what causes those outcomes? It is the deep peace, or the *shalom*, of God. Those practices - prayer, volunteer work, meditation, church attendance—are evidence of **a healthy, integrated, and balanced life. That's the way God intended for us to live.**” (9 - <https://www.apu.edu/articles/why-do-religious-people-...>) - **The Bible says** - “not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another..” (Hebrews 10:5). Jesus was our example of going regularly. “And as His (*Jesus*)” custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day” (Luke 4:16).



**6. Controlling Our Anger** - One big issue that can negatively impact our emotional and mental health is anger. **“Anger interrupts the functioning of our frontal lobes and causes us to lose the capacity for compassion and empathy.** It also releases a cascade of neurochemicals **that destroy the parts of the brain that control emotional reactions.** In other words, **anger causes us to lose our capacity to self-regulate,** to make a measured response regardless of the stimulus. ... **When we intently and consistently focus on our spiritual values,** we increase the blood flow to our frontal lobes and to our anterior cingulate, **which causes the activity in the emotional centers of our brain to decrease.** That helps us develop the capacity to make responses that maintain and even restore community. But conscious intention is the key. The more we focus on our inner values, the more we can take charge of our life.” (5) - **The Bible says** - “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—*it* only *causes* harm” (Psalm 37:8). The Bible directs us to control our thoughts, to choose our thoughts carefully. One passage says that whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy—think on these positive things (Philippians 4:8). The Bible has many other excellent verses about anger.



**7. Combining Them All Together** - Faith in a loving God, praying often, worshipping, reading the Bible, and attending church regularly can help **“prevent recovering substance abusers from relapsing.”** (7) “People with **major depressive disorder or chronic medical illness** who report high levels of religiosity, which includes **daily religious experiences,** generally **become more optimistic** than their peers.” (7) - **The Bible says** - “In God I have put my **trust; I will not fear**” (Psalm 56:4). **“... for the joy of the Lord is your strength”** (Nehemiah 8:10).

**8. What About You?** - Could your mental and emotional health benefit from following these practices? Do you know someone else who would benefit? Try following God’s directions for living, it will improve your mental and emotional health. He wants to help. Develop a loving relationship with Him. Please, reach out to us. Even better, come visit us!

**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 www.nationtakers.com

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