

**52 (Good) Reasons  
to Go to Church**  
*Besides the Obvious Ones*

**Paul McFate**

**Foreword by  
Gregory F. Augustine Pierce**



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*To my mother, who made me go to church, and all  
parents who thanklessly change the world by getting up  
every Sabbath morning to get themselves and their  
children out to the service.*



# Foreword

As a publisher, I was delighted to discover Paul McFate's little book. It is just what my customers need. As a layman, I was delighted to discover Paul McFate's little book. It is just what my church needs. As a father, I was delighted to discover Paul McFate's little book. It is just what my three teenagers need.

Why should we go to church? The primary reasons are clear: to worship and give thanks to God, to learn about our faith, to hear the word of God proclaimed, to ask for help with our needs and concerns, and to reflect on our role in the world and our ultimate destination. Those reasons, however, are obvious. What many people forget, or fail to realize, are the pragmatic reasons that we should attend church.

That's where this handy book comes in. Paul McFate has gathered together a collection of the practical, immediate reasons to go to church that will make a tangible difference in our everyday lives—including improvements in our health, our marriages, our children, our personal satisfaction and happiness, even our society at large. Any single one of the studies that are referenced here might not convince you, but the cumulative weight of all fifty-two reasons just might.

You'll note that we are not recommending a particular church or denomination to attend. That debate is for another time and another book. But we are recommending that you attend church, whether your reasons are obvious or not.

Gregory F. Augustine Pierce  
Co-Publisher, ACTA Publications





# Introduction

During a Christmas vacation to visit my family in Canada, I spent some time with my sister's family. I am godfather to my sister's younger daughter, and I realized that I hadn't done much in fulfilling that responsibility. As I pondered the role, I recalled that a godfather's main obligation is to ensure that the child is raised in the faith, attends church, and learns about God.

The question is, how does one encourage church attendance without being a nag? As my niece grows older, she may question the value of going to church. What will I tell her then? What reasons could I give as to why she should dedicate valuable time to attending church?

I decided to look into the research that has been done on the effects that going to church and other religious practices have on children and adults, to see if I could come up with some tangible evidence for why a person should attend church. Faithful churchgoers don't need concrete evidence. But for those young in the faith, or wavering, a little bit of hard evidence can be encouraging. Perhaps we all need a little encouragement in the faith at some time or another.

I had heard of a couple of scientific studies with intriguing results on the impact of going to church. Little did I expect to find literally hundreds of studies on the subject. Not all of the studies were positive, nor were they all based on sound scientific method. But the more I read, the more I realized I had happened onto something quite fascinating. Dozens upon dozens of research papers, experiments, surveys and studies were showing the dramatic positive effects of going to church and other religious activities. I wondered if I could come up with 52 studies, allowing me to send one per week to my family as a way of fulfilling my "god-fatherly" responsibilities. This, to my surprise, was not very difficult. With hundreds of studies to choose from, I picked primarily those with a large sample (ranging from 300

subjects to more than 100,000), which provides a bit of a safety net for drawing conclusions—the larger the sample, generally speaking, the more significant the results. Among these I found double blind studies, controlled studies, and studies carried out over years, even decades. I found studies based on hard medical and experimental data that showed going to church is good for us as individuals, good for families, and good for our communities, our country and our world.

I thought to share these with a minimum of comment, letting the data speak for itself. Although God did challenge us to “put me to the test” (Malachi 3:10), I do not offer these as a means of “proving” the existence of God. However, as Christ taught, “signs will accompany those who believe” (Mark 16:17). I offer these as some of the “signs” that God does seem to bless those who make an effort to come to church once a week.

## *Reason #1*

# **Reduced Blood Pressure**

In 1989 the *Journal of Religion and Health* published a study on the effects of church attendance on blood pressure. Researcher D. Larson and his colleagues found that smokers who did not attend church were seven times more likely to have abnormally high blood pressure. Smokers who did attend church had lower blood pressure, similar to nonsmokers who did not attend church. Larson concluded, "If you are going to smoke, make sure you go to church."

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Larson, D. W., H. G. Koenig, B. H. Kaplan, R. S. Greenberg, E. Loge, and H. A. Tyroler, "The Impact of Religion on Men's Blood Pressure," *Journal of Religion and Health* 28 (4), (1989): 265-278.

## *Reason #2*

# **Answers to Prayers**

People go to church to pray and worship God, but is there any evidence that prayer works? A number of experiments have been conducted on hospital patients, showing substantial evidence for the positive effects of prayer.

One such study was conducted by R. Byrd at San Francisco General Hospital. He studied 339 coronary patients over a ten-month period. The double blind study divided the patients into two groups. The first group was prayed for by church members of various denominations (Judeo-Christian). The people assigned to pray were given the first names of the patients and asked to pray for them regularly throughout the ten-month period. The control group was well matched to the test group as to seriousness of illness, age of patient, etc. According to Byrd, the prayer group had “less congestive heart failure, required less diuretic and antibiotic therapy, had fewer episodes of pneumonia, had fewer cardiac arrests, and were less frequently ventilated.” The patients, doctors, nurses and hospital staff had no knowledge of the purpose of the study. Subsequent studies have confirmed this result.

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Byrd, R. C., “Positive Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer in a Coronary Care Unit Population,” *Southern Medical Journal* 81 (1988): 826-829.

### *Reason #3*

## **Happier Marriages**

Can going to church improve your marriage? There is considerable evidence for this.

Take, for example, one study published in the *Review of Religious Research* in 1990. The study was conducted by M. G. Dudley and F. A. Kosinski. They tested 228 married Seventh-day Adventists for private religious practice (personal and family prayer, Bible reading), intrinsic religiosity (how the person feels about religion), and religious practice (going to church, witnessing, financial support). After controlling for a number of variants, the best predictor of happy marriage was found to be consistent religious practice—including attending church and personal and family devotion. This study is one of many that corroborate these findings across many faiths.

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Dudley, M. G., and F.A. Kosinski, "Religiosity and Marital Satisfaction: A Research Note," *Review of Religious Research* 32 (1990): 78-86.

## *Reason #4*

# **Better Behaved Teenagers**

A major study in 1998 reviewed religion's role in reducing high-risk behavior among high school students. The study was conducted by J. M. Wallace and T. A. Forman at the University of Michigan. A random group of 5,000 students—a very large sample—from 135 American high schools was selected for the study. A range of high-risk behaviors was studied, including interpersonal violence, driving under the influence of alcohol, carrying a weapon to school, cigarette and marijuana smoking, binge drinking, and seat belt use. They also studied lifestyle behaviors such as diet, exercise and sleep patterns. The researchers found that church attendance was associated with fewer deliberate, potentially injurious behaviors, less substance abuse, and better lifestyle choices. Those who indicated religion was important to them were far less likely to have taken a gun to school.

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Wallace, J. M., and T. A. Forman, "Religion's Role in Promoting Health and Reducing the Risk Among American Youth," *Health Education and Behavior* 25 (1998): 721-741.

## *Reason #5*

# **Better Personal Health**

Good researchers are hesitant to draw conclusions without substantial data to back them up. One method of testing the strength of a theory is to look at many studies on one subject to see if the trends are significant and “robust.” Church attendance has been shown in many studies to improve health.

In 1987, researchers J. S. Levin and H. Y. Vanderpool at the University of Texas examined the validity and outcome of more than twenty-seven studies on the impact of religion on health. They concluded that twenty of the twenty-seven studies indicated a positive correlation between church attendance and health, even when other factors were controlled. They noted that those who attended church often were healthier than those who went infrequently.

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Levin, J. S., and H. Y. Vanderpool, “Is Frequent Religious Attendance Really Conducive to Better Health? Toward an Epidemiology of Religion,” *Social Science Medicine* 24 (7), (1987): 589-600.