

# Tapping the fountain of youth

# 8 ways to live longer and stronger

BY CHRISTINA QUICK

As a professional dietician, 49-year-old Rose Clark of Willard, Mo., instinctively thought of food allergies when she started suffering from eczema, fatigue, facial swelling and eye pain a few years ago.

Her doctor agreed that food was likely the culprit and prescribed a special diet. Yet the symptoms didn't subside. One day as she was praying, Clark sensed God telling her that the source of her ailment was something she hadn't considered.

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“God told me my problem had nothing to do with food,” Clark says. “He said fear, rejection and anger were the causes and what I was seeing were the symptoms.”

Clark says God reminded her of someone she needed to forgive. As she knelt in prayer, she confessed her lack of forgiveness and asked God to help her release it. By the next day, most of her symptoms had vanished.

“I could have spent my whole life modifying my diet and never dealing with the real issue, which was forgiveness,” Clark says. “Not every disease has that kind of inner root, but I believe there are times when God wants to heal us from the inside out.”

Though some doctors would view Clark’s story with skepticism, a mounting body of evidence suggests our beliefs — and how we practice them — are more closely linked to physical health than the scientific community previously imagined.

“They’re very intertwined,” says Dr. Harold G. Koenig, co-director and founder of Duke University’s Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health in Durham, N.C. “A human being is truly made up of a mind, a body and a spirit, and they are so connected that you cannot separate them. We’ve been trying to pull them apart for a couple hundred years and it just doesn’t work.”

In their efforts to unravel the mystery of why some people live longer and enjoy better health than others, researchers like Koenig

have made some remarkable discoveries. As it turns out, you don’t have to compete in triathlons or discover the fountain of youth to add years to your life — and life to your years. Many of the secrets to longevity and good health aren’t secrets at all. In fact, they’re right out of the pages of Scripture.

“The Word of God is not only life, but medicine,” says Stephen Sparks, Senior Adult Ministries director for the Assemblies of God. “When you live by the Word and do the Word, you’re getting back to the basics of the way God designed you to function.”

Consider the following eight Bible principles that are now touted and supported by modern medical research.

## Forgive

Forgiveness is a central element of Christianity. Jesus himself said the purpose of His death was to secure forgiveness for our sins (Matthew 26:28). He also warned that we must forgive others in order to receive God’s forgiveness (Matthew 6:14,15).

There may be other benefits of forgiveness as well. Dr. Frederic Luskin, a Stanford researcher and author of the book *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness*, has found that those who let go of grudges tend to have fewer physical symptoms of stress and a lower risk of cardiovascular disease.

Another study from Duke Uni-

versity Medical Center showed that people who forgive others experience less pain, anger and depression.

## Pray and read the Bible

Proverbs 4:22 describes God’s wisdom as “life” and “health to a man’s whole body” (NIV). Koenig’s research has demonstrated the literal truth of these words.

In one study, Koenig found that senior adults who didn’t pray and read the Bible were 47 percent more likely to die during the study period. This held true even after factoring in social differences and health behaviors, such as diet, exercise and smoking and drinking habits. Other studies have shown similar health benefits for younger people.

“People who pray, read the Bible and are involved in a religious community are mentally and physically healthier, less depressed and less anxious,” Koenig says. “They have better immune function that we can actually measure, they don’t use as many health services and they live longer.”

## Attend church

Next time you’re tempted to skip church, you might want to think again — especially since church attendance may add eight years to your life. A 1999 National Health Interview Survey that followed 21,204 people over eight years found that those who

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## Volunteering was found to be an even greater predictor of longevity than exercise.



didn't attend weekly religious services were almost twice as likely to die as regular attendees.

Based on the results, researchers calculated that the average life expectancy at age 20 for frequent church attendees is 83 years, compared to 75 years for those who stay away from church or attend infrequently.

"These findings do not indicate that nonattenders who start attending services, and change nothing else, will live eight years longer," says David Myers, an author and psychology professor at Hope College in Holland, Mich. "But they do indicate that as a predictor of health and longevity, religious involvement rivals non-smoking and exercise effects."

### Don't worry

In explaining the futility of worry, Jesus reminded His disciples that they could not add even an hour to their lives by fretting (Luke 12:25,26). Researchers have found, in fact, that worry can reduce a person's life span.

A 1997 Harvard study showed that worriers have an increased risk of coronary heart disease. A 2000 Mayo Clinic study demonstrated that optimists, on average, live longer than pessimists.

A more recent study from Australia concluded that individuals who live to be 100 tend to worry less throughout their lifetimes than the average person.

Even worrying about getting older can shave years off a person's life, according to a Yale

University report. In that study, people who said they had positive perceptions about aging lived an average of 7.6 years longer than those who held negative views.

### Laugh

Proverbs 17:22 says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." Cardiologists at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore would likely agree. In a study involving 300 people, doctors found that people who developed heart disease generally laughed less and displayed more anger and hostility.

In addition, Japanese researchers have found a connection between laughter and lower blood sugar levels among both diabetics and nondiabetics.

"People become healthier from laughter," says Judy Goldblum-Carlton, a humor therapist at the University of Maryland Children's Division of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology. "It improves circulation. When you laugh heartily, every organ is being massaged, including your heart, lungs and digestive system."

### Rest

Although He is omnipotent and could never tire, God himself demonstrated for us the value of rest when He paused on the seventh day of creation. When Jesus walked the Earth, He too set aside time for rest, frequently going to a secluded setting for prayer and rejuvenation.

Unfortunately, modern society places little value on rest. Many people today work longer hours, get less sleep and take fewer vacation days than ever before. These practices have been linked to such problems as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and depression.

A Harvard study found an increased likelihood of premature death among those who get less than six hours of sleep per night. Another study, published in 2002 in the *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* journal, showed that longer work hours and fewer days off significantly increased the risk of heart attack among workers in the United Kingdom.

In addition to disease risks, the National Sleep Foundation estimates that 23 percent of Americans have fallen asleep while driving — an act that claims more than 1,500 lives annually.

### Stay married

The Bible supports the institution of marriage and encourages married couples to stay together. After witnessing the disastrous effects of rising divorce rates over the past few decades, experts from a wide range of fields are making the same recommendation. Not only does divorce wreak havoc on finances and personal relationships, it can also take a toll on the physical and emotional health of those involved.

Numerous studies have shown that married people tend to live longer. Divorce, on the other

hand, appears to have a detrimental effect on health. A 2005 study funded by the National Institute on Aging found that divorced people are more likely to suffer from heart and lung disease, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke.

According to the Center for the Study of Aging, by the time divorced men reach age 50, their health declines more rapidly than the health of those who remain married.

A study from the University of California at Riverside also found that divorced men are more likely to commit suicide. The increased risk factor was not present for men who were widowed or had never married.

### Give

The Bible teaches that it's more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). While there are many rewards to giving, longevity may be a nice bonus.

According to a study conducted by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, those who help others tend to live longer. Even after accounting for other contributing factors, participants who reported providing no help to others were more than twice as likely to die during the five-year study period.

Receiving help from others, however, was not shown to reduce mortality.

Similarly, a decade-long study in Israel found that elderly people

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## ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

**A. Admit you are a sinner.**  
"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

**Ask God's forgiveness.**  
"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13

**B. Believe in Jesus** (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.  
"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

**Become a child of God by receiving Christ.**  
"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

**C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.**  
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

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who volunteer on a regular basis outlive not only those who do not volunteer, but also those who postpone retirement to continue their careers. Amazingly, volunteering was found to be an even greater predictor of longevity than exercise.

Of course, there are no guarantees of perfect health or long life. Even the most committed Christians are susceptible to sickness and tragedy. Yet the Bible's principles continue to withstand the test of time and prove their trustworthiness in every facet of life.


Proverbs 3:5-8 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones."

"There's a balance of doing what we know to do and trusting God with our lives," says Sparks. "My grandfather lived to be 94, but my son passed away at 21 from cancer. No matter how long or short our lives may be, there is great wisdom and a wealth of blessings in living each day according to the Word of God." **tpe**

CHRISTINA QUICK is staff writer for *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

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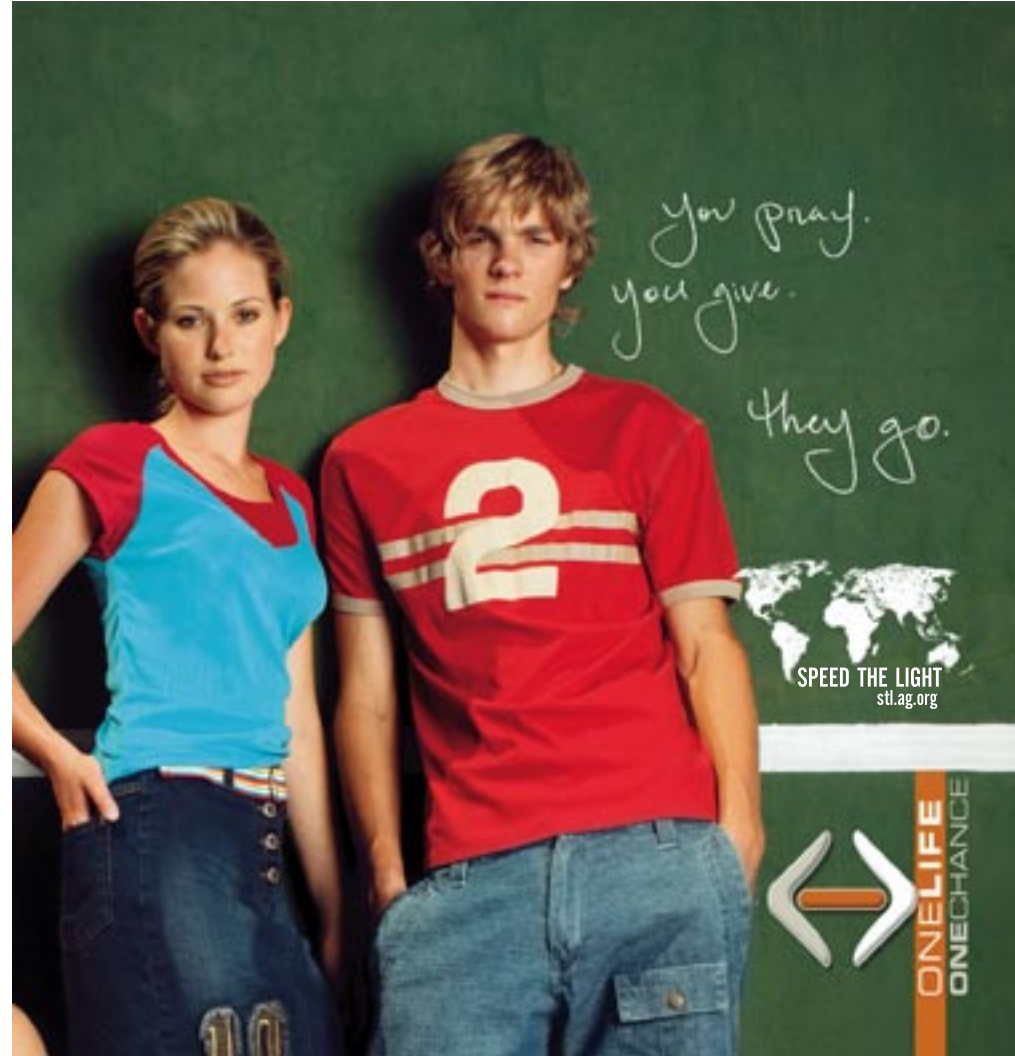
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