



DECEMBER 7, 2016

Christianity is a crutch...you may need it someday

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In a recent [USA Today OpEd](#), Harvard epidemiologist, Tyler VanderWeele, presented the growing body of evidence that religious participation is – quite literally – good for you. Multiple studies have shown that regular church attendance is beneficial for one’s mental and physical health. In the colorful language of the article, religion is a “miracle drug.”

And yet the proportion of university students who do not identify with a particular religious tradition is at an all-time high. According to the [leading survey of the beliefs and practices of students in the US](#), 5.9% of college students now identify as atheists. A further 8.3% are agnostics, and 15.4% check “none” as the best descriptor of their current religious preference. So what keeps nearly 30% of the students away from belief in God?

Motivated unbelief

Some students are either theoretical atheists or practical ones (living as if God doesn’t exist), because they were raised that way by non-believing parents. All things being equal, [most of us retain our parents’ beliefs](#). Others have known religious believers who were cruel, dishonest or hypocritical. Many are bothered by evils historically committed by Christians – for example, instances of anti-Semitism, the oppression of women, or justification of slavery – and are understandably less aware of the ways in which the Christian movement has formed our belief in human equality and care for the oppressed.

In academic communities, one frequently encounters the assertion that intellectual difficulties constitute the main problem. Challenges include the perceived paucity of evidence for God, the lack of a bullet-proof solution to the problem of evil, and the existence of multiple, equally plausible religions. There is no doubt that such factors are significant.

But Christianity teaches that our deepest motivation for rejecting God is pride. We do not want to admit that we need the guidance, protection, or forgiveness of God. We prefer to live independent lives.

Do we need God?

But I want to argue that living your life apart from God can be unworkable. Here is the reason: You might just find some day that you need God. For example, you might encounter a problem in your life that desperately needs solving and that you are unable to solve. Many people in fact come to God in the midst of crises like that. Perhaps that is why **nearly 40% of people who grow up in non-religious homes in the US become religious as adults**. Indeed, I would suggest that people never come to God unless they feel a need for God in their lives.

Maybe one day you will find yourself laid off at work, with a family to support, and no immediate prospects. Maybe one day you will find yourself with an alcohol or drug problem that you are no longer able to resist, one that threatens your career, your marriage, your self-respect, and maybe even your life. Maybe one day you will be told that your spouse is dying of cancer, and you cannot face the prospect of life without him or her. Maybe one day you will be told that you have a dreaded disease of which there is no known cure, and that you have at most a few months to live. Maybe one day you will discover that your fourteen year-old daughter is pregnant or that your son is in trouble with the police. Maybe one day you will find that the terrible guilt you feel from some past action of yours is crushing you and that you have no idea how to get rid of it. Maybe one night you will wake up with the sickening realization that your life has no purpose or meaning. You're just treading water. Something is missing. In those sorts of situations, you may discover that you need God.

Finding God in crisis

In Matthew 13:44, Jesus said: *"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."* We can imagine a first century Palestinian man perhaps looking for some lost sheep after a storm. In someone else's field he finds a box half exposed by the runoff of rainwater. He discovers that the box is full of treasure and then hurriedly covers it up. He speaks as calmly as possible with the owner of the field

and establishes how much he wants for it. He then excitedly sells all his own fields and property in order to raise the purchase price of the field that contains the treasure.

Finding the help of God in the midst of a crisis in life can be one of the greatest things in the world. It is worth any amount of money. But exactly what is the treasure that Jesus had in mind? This is an important question. Christianity claims to offer us something, to be sure, but not immunity from life's problems. Christians are no more cancer-free or securely employed than atheists. So what exactly is it that is so priceless?

Our restless hearts

The fourth century, North-African theologian, Augustine – who rejected his parents' Christian beliefs and lived a hedonistic lifestyle between the ages of 17 and 31 before becoming a Christian – once offered this striking prayer: “O God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.” The Christian claim is that we human beings need God, and the reason that we need God is that God created us to need God. Of course there are many things that we need in order to thrive as human beings—air to breathe, food to eat, shelter from the elements, the nurturing love of parents, etc. But the Christian claim is that the most important human need—more basic than any other—is our need for loving fellowship with God.

For most of us, the first step in finding God is confessing our inability to save ourselves, to find meaning in life, to find release from guilt, to be able to endure after one of life's crushing blows. Some people call Christianity a crutch. Maybe the first step in finding God is to admit that Christianity *is* a crutch. But to consider whether you – like me – may be suffering from a broken leg.

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