

Faith May Be the Exact Key to Living Longer, Research Shows

If you are in Los Angeles and hop on the 10 Freeway heading east for about 69 miles, you will eventually come to a town of 23,000 people, called Loma Linda—Spanish for *Beautiful Hill*. If you get off at Anderson Street, you will immediately notice two things. One, the sprawling university medical center with the same name as the town. Their mission: “continuing the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus Christ.” The other is the prevailing presence of the Seventh Day Adventists. It is the largest community of those practicing this Protestant-based religion in the country; about 7,000 attend the university’s campus church.

Candidly, despite its pretty Spanish name, unless you need to get gas, you will likely keep heading down the road. At first glance, there is nothing particularly remarkable about Loma Linda, California. However, if you know anything about the area, you will know that this is the only place, within our U.S. borders, where people live, on average, about a decade longer than the rest of us, many hitting 100 years of age.

Of course, this begs the question: How does this landlocked, average-looking, suburban community manage to be part of the % of the U.S. population that reaches their centennial? Well, it starts with their faith, which informs how they live.

If you visit Loma Linda on a Saturday, good luck finding much of anything open, other than the church. Similar to the Jewish religion, Seventh Day Adventists (SDAs) observe God’s day of rest on the Sabbath, from Friday at sunset through Saturday. The Sabbath is their weekly time for worship, family, community and being in nature. All work is set aside for 24 hours. When not at church, these folks are out hiking, bike-riding and having family meals. They are recharging their

mind, body and spirit.

Next, the SDAs take their dietary lead from the Bible, Genesis 1:29: "Then God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is on the face of all the earth and every tree which has fruit yielding seed. It shall be food for you.'" This means they mainly eat a plant and nut-infused diet with little to no dairy, processed foods or refined sugar. Some are pesco-vegetarians who eat a bit of fish. There is no smoking and no alcohol.

While the dietary habits of the SDAs living in Loma Linda are noteworthy, what drew me to researching them is their faith and how that seems to correlate to their increased level of happiness, which arguably helps them to live longer.

Research that was done by nearby University of California Riverside's "happiness expert," Sonja Lyubomirsky, indicates that those who have a spiritual community—however you define this for yourself—and are active in it, tend to be happier and live longer. Why? Being engaged in a spiritual community gives people a sense of belonging and being needed—which in turn uplifts one's sense of purpose, emphasizing that life has meaning and there is a reason to get up every day.

New York Times bestselling author and founder of the Blue Zones organization Dan Buettner studies places around the world where people, on average, live longer than most and has recognized the longevity phenomena happening in Loma Linda. He says that most of SDAs' friends are other SDAs. Because of their religion, they are less likely to engage in harmful, unhealthy behavior. You could say instead of playing with the devil you know, it is the angel.

So, why is any of this significant, other than the obvious? Globally, we are shifting more and more toward measuring people's happiness and life satisfaction. No longer is the measure of a country's or of a human's success solely based on

economics. It is also about the quality of life one lives.

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?” (Matt. 16:26). Right?

To be clear, I am not building a case to become a Seventh Day Adventist or even to join a church or synagogue if that is not your leaning. What I am suggesting is that you consider the aspects of your life that you can make sacred, more spiritual to you—those actions that will lead to a positive outcome.

Here are four ways you can add a sacred or spiritual dimension to your life:

—A few minutes every day, preferably in the morning or before you go to bed, consider your purpose in life. Think about how you can make your life, community and the world a better place. It may help to journal about this.

—Every day, read something spiritual or uplifting—this can be preceded or ended with a moment of prayer or meditation.

—Explore different biblical practices. See what resonates with you.

—Find a community of like-minded people and become active with them.

Here is the other and final thing. Spirituality, sanctifying aspects of your life as sacred, helps you to have more positive emotions, which leads to being happier, which leads to living longer.

“May you live long and prosper.” {eo}

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