

Study examines how religious faith bolsters family hope and unity

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The study reveals that a family's religious beliefs and practices significantly foster hope and resilience, promoting unity. Credit: Nate Edwards/BYU Photo

A new study from Brigham Young University finds that a family's religious beliefs and practices are a key catalyst to promote hope in the

future and hope to manage personal challenges, which can help families build resiliency and unity.

To understand the relationship between [religious beliefs](#) and hope within family relations, researchers carefully analyzed in-depth interviews with nearly 200 religious families who represented a range of religions (Christian, Jewish, Muslim) and demographic features.

Participants were asked a series of questions about their family processes and religion in [family life](#). While none of the questions inquired directly about hope, the responses offered by many families centered around hope and led researchers to categorize the respondents' references to hope.

The findings from the study, which were published in the [journal *Family Relations*](#), underscore the pivotal role that religious beliefs and practices play in nurturing hope within a family. Participants frequently cited their faith as a wellspring of hope, drawing strength from their belief in God's active involvement in their lives and their conviction in an afterlife. Engaging in religious practices such as scripture reading and worship services further solidified their sense of hope, regardless of religious denomination.

"One of the main things I take away from this study is how much commonality there is across faiths," said David Dollahite, BYU family life professor and co-author. "The overarching message from our research is that faith and religion and belief, when taken seriously, produce profound similarities, including increased hope for the future and hope in God's plan for their family. Highly [religious people](#) across faiths have a lot in common."

Notably, in 39% of the hope-related discussions, hope was characterized as a familial trait and value—a collective "our hope." Parents expressed

a strong desire to instill hope in their children, recognizing the positive impact it had on their ability to navigate life's challenges. Moreover, hope was found to fortify marital bonds and mitigate conflicts.

"We're finding that virtues instilled as part of a religious family are very relational," noted Dollahite. "While there have been [news stories](#) about the epidemic of loneliness in society, our research shows the power that faith and religion have in strengthening relationships. Faith and family are a powerful antidote to loneliness. Faith and family can bring hope and can be a remedy to some of the main issues we see in society."

Deepening our understanding of hope has positive benefits for individuals and societies, said Joe Chelladurai, former BYU Ph.D. student and now a senior researcher at the Church's Correlation Research Division, who co-authored the paper.

"There is passive and active hope. Active hope is something that can be developed," said Chelladurai.

"I feel that developing hope during times of normalcy can help prepare someone when they face difficult challenges. According to C.R. Snyder, the pioneer of hope theory, hope involves three aspects: goals; way power, or the ability to creatively find more than one way towards a goal; and willpower, or the motivation to try. One way to develop hope is by strengthening each of these aspects when things get hard and cognitive load and psychological tunnel vision set in."

Researchers identified four main themes in the ways families expressed how religious beliefs inspired their hope.

Faith and religious belief prompt hope

Many participants noted that their faith both provided and helped sustain

their hope.

"When something happened in my family, [faith](#) let us know that we have the same hope. ... When I had challenges of career or health, I realized that all of our life is in God's hand. This gives me a lot [of] comfort and also gives me promise," noted one interviewee.

Religious practices inspire hope

Many interviewees noted that participating in regular [religious practices](#), such as reading religious texts, praying and attending worship services, was important in providing hope.

"There's always hope ... no matter what happens in our lives. ... We believe in what God says in His Word, and so there's always something in the Word that will make it good," noted a Christian participant.

Hope can be a familial trait

While many researchers study hope as an individual trait, Dollahite and his colleagues found that 39% of the data they analyzed identified hope as a trait the family collectively held. Participants frequently described hope in words such as "our hope" or by saying, "We have hope."

"We try hard to make our kids know that they're loved and that there's hope and there's always someone there that loves them and cares for them," said one participant.

Hope builds resilience

The research found that the primary ways that the participants experienced religious hope was through a hope for the future and a hope

to overcome challenges, not only individually, but as a [family](#) unit.

"We are not without hope. We are not hopeless. [We] have prayer. ... Those are anchors that we have that others may not have. Although it may look bleak right now, there's always hope because of the hope that you have in Christ," said another participant.

More information: Heather H. Kelley et al, "We have hope": An exploration of hope in highly religious families, *Family Relations* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/fare.12937](https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12937)

Provided by Brigham Young University

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