According to physician-medical scholar Dr. Walt Larimore, author of 10 Essentials of Highly Healthy People (Zondervan), several studies demonstrate that religious faith and spirituality can and do have a positive impact on our mental and physical well-being. Please consider:

Longer Life: "Between 1987 and 1995, a nationwide study of more than 21,000 adults showed a seven-year longer life expectancy in those who attended religious services more than once a week compared to those that never attended."

Lower Blood Pressure: "A study of 401 men in Georgia published by Duke researchers in 1989 showed lower blood pressure (and less hypertension) in those who considered religion very important and who attended church regularly."

Improved Mental Health: "According to a 1997 Duke University study of more than 4,000 adults age 60 and older, frequent attendees at worship services had significantly reduced rates of depression and anxiety."

Overall Well-being: "Epidemiologist Jeff Levin's 1994 research showed that adults age 60 and older who considered themselves religious had fewer health problems."...

In his book Faith and Mental Health (Templeton Foundation Press), Dr. Harold Koenig, founder and director of Duke University's Center for the Study of Religion/Spirituality and Health, points out that "many studies have explored the relationship between religious practices and positive emotions such as well-being, happiness, hope, meaning, purpose, and optimism. Of 100 studies that examined religion and well-being prior to the year 2000, nearly 60 percent found a statistically significant relationship between greater religious involvement and greater life satisfaction, happiness, better mood, or higher morals."

In their work The Spiritual Brain (Harper, San Francisco), Cana-dian scholar Mario Beauregard and journalist Denyse O'Leary discuss a study of the impact of religious faith on mental and physical well-being. Social scientists Edward Larson, Dale Matthews, and Constance Berry "conducted a detailed review of 158 medical studies on the effects of religion on health, 77 percent of which demonstrated a positive clinical effect. . . . Similarly, a prospective study of nearly four thousand seniors (aged 64-101) who were not disabled but lived in a residence during 1986-1992 found that private religious activities such as meditation, prayer, and Bible study were associated with greater survival rates."

Physician and cancer survivor Dr. Wendy Harpham tells us in her book Diagnosis: Cancer (W. W. Norton) that "a cancer diagnosis challenges your spiritual faith. The effect can vary widely, precipitating intense fear or providing incredible calm. Your faith may fluctuate from day to day leaving you feeling confused, angry, or lonely. In facing your mortality . . . you put your spiritual beliefs to the test. Ancancer diagnosis often prompts patients to ask the big questions, such as, 'What is the meaning of my life?' 'Do I believe in God?' 'Where is God in my time of trouble?'"

In this regard, an article by Carolyn Susman, a health issues writer for the Palm Beach Post, observes: "We probably all know people who believe in the power of prayer to aid the sick . . . But now, those who believe in prayer are getting support for their views from . . . the scientific community. Praying for sick patients, as a means to get well, may actually contribute to their recovery according to a new study by Duke University researchers."

According to Tracey Koepke, a spokesperson for the Duke University Medical Center, researchers found that "the patients who were prayed for had better outcomes than the patients who were not prayed for, because they had fewer
Mr. Gow is a TV and radio commentator and writer who teaches religion to children at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Greenville, Mississippi.