

Reading the Bible, Stressful Life Events, and Hope: Assessing an Overlooked Coping Resource

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Abstract Many people rely on religion to deal with the stressors in their lives. The purpose of this study is to examine a religious coping resource that has received relatively little attention—reading the Bible. We evaluated three hypotheses: (1) reading the Bible moderates the relationship between stress and hope; (2) people who read the Bible more often are more likely to rely on benevolent religious reappraisal coping responses; and (3) individuals who rely on benevolent religious reappraisals will be more hopeful about the future. Support was found for all three hypotheses in our analyses.

Keywords Bible · Stressful events · Hope

It seems that virtually every survey on religion contains a question on how often study participants read the Bible or other sacred literature. However, these data have not been exploited fully. Instead, questions on reading sacred literature are, more often than not, relegated to the status of a control variable or they are combined with other religious behaviors to form more comprehensive indices of private religious practices (Ciarrocchi et al. 2008; Davis and Epkins 2009; Marquine et al. 2015). Handling Bible reading in this manner makes it easy to overlook important functions that may be performed by this particular type of religious behavior.

As Hood et al. (2009) maintain, religion performs a number of important functions. One function involves helping people cope with adversity. The purpose of the current study is to see whether reading the Bible or other sacred literature serves as a potentially important

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coping resource. We have been able to identify only two quantitative studies that focus specifically on turning to religious literature in the face of adversity. The first study was conducted by Johnson et al. (2016). These investigators studied 101 women who were diagnosed with PTSD. They report that women with PTSD were more likely to read the Bible on a regular basis when they were exposed to a traumatic life event. The second study was conducted by Tepper et al. (2001). These researchers studied 406 individuals who were diagnosed with persistent mental illness. They found that 30% of their study participants turned to reading scriptures in an effort to cope with symptoms of mental illness. Since both of these studies were conducted with special populations, it is difficult to determine whether the findings can be generalized to a wider population.

Further support for the notion that religious literature is a potentially important coping resource is provided by a small cluster of qualitative studies. Based on a series of in-depth interviews, Arcury et al. (2000) found that reading the Bible was a common response to the challenges that are associated with disease self-management. Similarly, Gerdner et al. (2007) found that one of the primary ways in which family members helped women who were dealing with caregiving stressors involved reading Bible passages to them on a regular basis. Another qualitative study by Hamilton et al. (2013) suggests that the Bible is often used as a mental-health-promoting resource during stressful times. Further support for the notion that people turn to sacred literature in order to cope with adversity is found in the research program of Krause (2002). He conducted a series of qualitative studies in an effort to develop closed-ended survey items on religiousness. One closed-ended item in his resulting measure of spiritual support asked study participants to report how often, "... someone in your congregation helps you find solutions to your problems in the Bible?" (Krause 2008, p. 38).

The findings from the studies that have been reviewed so far suggest that some people turn to the Bible for help in dealing with stressors they encounter in their lives. However, this research does not directly test whether people reap specific benefits from doing so. In order to address this issue, researchers must assess whether reading the Bible moderates the relationship between stress- and health-related outcomes. We are unaware of any studies that empirically evaluate this statistical interaction with data from members of the general population. The first goal of the current study is to address this gap in the literature.

Two questions must be addressed at this juncture in order to flesh out the theoretical underpinnings of our study. First, it is important to reflect more deeply on what people may actually get (or hope to receive) when they turn to sacred literature during difficult times. As we will discuss below, addressing this issue provides a way of thinking about religious coping that has not received sufficient attention in the literature. Second, it is important to identify an outcome measure that is well suited for capturing the potential benefits of turning to the Bible for help in overcoming adversity.

What Reading Religious Literature May Provide

Wuthnow's (1994) widely cited work on support groups in American society provides a useful source of information on what people hope to get when they turn to sacred literature for assistance. This work is relevant because Wuthnow (1994) devotes considerable attention to Bible study groups, which are formal groups in religious institutions that are designed to help people learn about their faith by discussing scriptures and other religiously oriented literature. Wuthnow (1994) reports that an important function of Bible study groups is to help people deal with personal crises. This is accomplished by helping

people deepen their faith and develop more realistic and mature ways of thinking about the nature of God. A more mature view of God includes trusting in Him and believing that what has happened is part of His plan for helping those who are in need. This function corresponds closely to Pargament's notion of a benevolent religious reappraisal coping response (Pargament et al. 2000). As Pargament and his colleagues argue, benevolent religious reappraisals do not deny the reality of the seriousness of an event (Pargament et al. 2000). Instead, this type of coping response helps a person reframe the meaning of a stressful situation by placing it in a larger more positive and hopeful religious context. Based on these insights, the second goal of the current study is to see whether turning to sacred literature is associated with greater use of benevolent religious coping responses.

Pursuing this second goal is important because it highlights an understudied dimension of religious coping and represents a shift in thinking about reading the Bible. Instead of being a form of instructional religious practice or discipline, reading the Bible in this context becomes a way of coming to terms with one's own life problems. Based on the discussion that has been provided up to this point, we view reading religious literature as a religious coping resource in its own right. Similarly, benevolent religious reappraisals are also construed as a religious coping resource. By linking the two empirically, we aim to show that one religious coping resource (i.e., reading the Bible) serves as a gateway for a second religious coping resource (i.e., adopting benevolent religious reappraisals). The two differ in that one (Bible reading) is a more distal factor, while the other (benevolent reappraisals) is a more proximal factor in the coping process. However, they are similar because when they are taken together, they provide a richer conceptual view of the way in which people may use their faith to deal with adversity: they rely on multiple religious coping resources, not just one and they may activate these resources in a sequential manner.

We were unable to find any studies in the literature that examine the association between reading the Bible and benevolent religious coping responses. However, research by Vishkin and his colleagues provides some support for examining this relationship (Vishkin et al. 2006). These investigators report that individual who are more religious are more likely to use general cognitive reappraisal coping responses. Our work attempts to bring this relationship into sharper focus by examining one specific dimension of religion that may be involved in this relationship (i.e., Bible reading) and coping responses that are more explicitly religious in nature (i.e., benevolent religious reappraisals).

How the Benefits of Reading Religious Literature May be Manifest

Hope is the primary outcome variable in the analyses that are provided below. The reason for choosing this outcome measures can be traced to two findings in the literature. First, research reviewed by Folkman (2010) suggests that stress may erode a person's sense of hope. Second, the benevolent reappraisals coping strategy that was discussed above may help replenish a threatened sense of hope. This coping response includes the belief that even though one is faced with adversity, God has a plan. Moreover, this plan will strengthen a focal person, thereby allowing them to ultimately hand the stressful situation successfully. Implied in this perspective is the notion that although the precise nature of the plan may not have been grasped fully, some people have faith and hope that the plan will ultimately lead to the best outcome. There are both biblical as well as social psychological reasons why hope makes a good outcome in the research on religion and stress.

With respect to a biblical basis, the apostle Paul succinctly captured the role of hope in the process of relying on religion to deal with adversity: “We also glorify in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, and character hope.” (Romans 5:3–5, New International Version). It follows from this that if a person turns to the Bible for solace and guidance during difficult times, they may eventually become more hopeful about the future.

Snyder and his colleagues provide a clear social psychological framework for linking involvement in religion with hope (Snyder et al. 2002). According to these investigators, hope is viewed as a goal-directed cognitive process that includes both planning and the motivation to reach goals. These researchers go on to point out that religion provides a prepackaged configuration of goals, pathways for accomplishing these goals, and the necessary cognitions for successfully pursuing the pathways. Perhaps this is one reason why Capps (1996) argues that pastors are fundamentally providers of hope: “Pastors, I suggest, are *agents of hope by definition* (or calling) and often that is *all they are*” (p. 325, emphasis in the original).

Findings from a number of empirical studies are consistent with this logic. More specifically, research by Krause and his colleagues (Krause 2014; Krause and Hayward 2012; Krause et al. 2015) as well as studies by Jankowski and Sandage (2011) indicates that greater involvement in various aspects of religious life is associated with a greater sense of hope.

Taken as a whole, the discussion that is provided above leads to the following study hypotheses:

H₁ The magnitude of the relationship between stress and hope will be lower for people who read the Bible more frequently.

H₂ People who read the Bible more frequently will be more likely to adopt a benevolent religious reappraisal coping strategy.

H₃ Individuals who adopt a benevolent religious reappraisal coping strategy will be more hopeful about the future.

Methods

Sample

The data for this study come from a nationwide, face-to-face, random probability survey of people aged 18 and older who live in the coterminous USA. The interviews, which were completed in 2014, were conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). The response rate for this study was 50%. A total of 3010 interviews were completed successfully. The sample was stratified into the following age groups: age 18–40 (N = 1000), age 41–64 (N = 1002), and age 65 and older (N = 1008).

After using listwise deletion to deal with item nonresponse, data were available for between 2873 and 2159 study participants. The reason for different sample sizes is the way information on benevolent religious reappraisals was obtained. Study participants were given a checklist of 12 life events they may have encountered in the past 18 months. The respondents were asked to identify the one life event that was most stressful for them. Following this, study participants were told to keep this event in mind as they answer the questions on benevolent religious reappraisals. A total of 707 study participants were

excluded from the current study because they did not encounter a major stressor in the previous 18 months.

A series of preliminary analyses were performed in order to develop a demographic profile of the participants in this study. These analyses suggest that the average age of the participants in the current study was 46.4 years (SD 17.7 years), 43.8% are men, 44.7% were married at the time of the interview, and the average level of educational attainment was 13.4 years (SD 3.1 years). These descriptive data as well as the findings that are presented below are based on data that have been weighted.

Measures

Table 1 contains the measures of the core constructs that are evaluated in this study. The procedures that were used to code these indicators are given in the footnotes of this table.

Hope

Three indicators were taken from the work of Scheier and Carver (1985) to measure hope. A high score denotes greater hope ($M = 11.0$; $SD 2.1$; range 3–15). The internal consistency reliability estimate (i.e., Cronbach's α) for the composite measure of hope is .707.¹

Bible Reading

A single indicator that assesses how often study participants read the Bible when they are alone was taken from the work of the Fetzer Institute/National Institute on Aging Working Group (1999). A high score on this item represents study participants who read the Bible more often ($M = 3.1$; $SD 2.4$; range 1–8).

Stressful Life Events

Exposure to stressful life events was assessed with a 12-item checklist that was developed by Moos et al. (1984). A simple count of the number of events that respondents had encountered in the 18-month period prior to the survey was computed. The average number of events was 2.7 ($SD 2.1$; range 0–12).

Benevolent Religious Reappraisals

This coping response measure was developed by Pargament and his colleagues (Pargament et al. 2000). A high score stands for respondents who relied on this coping strategy more

¹ Scheier and Carver (1985) claim that the items in their scale assess optimism, but we refer to them as indicators of hope. Following the seminal work of Peterson and Seligman (2004), we believe the terms “hope” and “optimism” are virtually synonymous. Moreover, these investigators note, the correlation between the two is “considerable” (Peterson and Seligman 2004, p. 570) and despite differences in the way they are operationalized, the correlates of these constructs are “strikingly similar” (Peterson and Seligman 2004, p. 570). The reader might also wonder whether the items we use to assess hope capture a state-like or trait-like phenomenon. Generally speaking, state-like phenomenon are less stable than trait-like phenomenon. However, as we will show below, stressful life events tend to be negatively associated with hope, suggesting that the construct we measure changes over time. Clearly, longitudinal data are needed to address this issue.

Table 1 Core study measures

-
1. Hope^a
 - A. I always look at the bright side of things
 - B. I'm optimistic about my future
 - C. In uncertain times, I usually expect the best
 2. Bible reading^b

When you are at home, how often do you read the Bible?
 3. Stressful life events^c
 - A. Moved to a new residence
 - B. Death of a close friend
 - C. Separation or divorce
 - D. Trouble with family members
 - E. Trouble with friends or neighbors
 - F. Your own serious illness or injury
 - G. Serious illness or injury of a family member
 - H. Death of a spouse
 - I. Death of an immediate family member (other than spouse)
 - J. Unemployed for more than a month
 - K. Income decreased substantially (20% or more)
 - L. Assaulted or robbed
 4. Benevolent religious reappraisals^d
 - A. Saw my situation as part of God's plan
 - B. Tried to find a lesson from God in the event
 - C. Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation
 5. Church attendance^e

How often do you attend religious services?
 6. Private prayer^b

How often do you pray by yourself?
-

^aThese items were scored in the following manner (coding in parentheses): strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), uncertain (3), agree (4), strongly agree (5)

^bThis item was scored in the following manner: never (1), less than once a month (2), once a month (3), a few times a month (4), once a week (5), a few times a week (6), once a day (7), several times a day (8)

^cA simple count was taken of the number of events that were experienced

^dThese items were scored in the following manner: not at all (1), a little bit (2), quite a lot (3), a great deal (4)

^eThis item was scored in the following manner: never (1), less than once a year (2), about once or twice a year (3), several times a year (4), about once a month (5), 2 to 3 times a month (6), nearly every week (7), every week (8), several times a week (9)

often ($M = 7.5$; $SD 2.9$; range 3–12). The reliability estimate for this brief composite is .855.

Religion Control Variables

Two additional measures of religion were included in the analyses provided below to help insure that the effects were due to bible reading per se and not some other dimension of

religion that is associated with it. These religion control variables assess the frequency of church attendance and the frequency of private prayer. These items were taken from research by the Fetzer Institute/National Institute on Aging Working Group (1999). A high score on these items reflects more frequent church attendance ($M = 4.7$; $SD 2.8$; range 1–9) and more frequent private prayer ($M = 5.9$; $SD 2.5$; range 1–8), respectively.

Demographic Control Variables

The relationships among the measures in Table 1 were estimated after the effects of age, sex, education, and marital status were controlled statistically. Age and education were scored continuously in years, whereas sex (1 = men; 0 = women) and marital status (1 = married; 0 = otherwise) were coded in a binary format.

Data Analysis Strategy

The first hypothesis that was developed for this study specifies that the relationship between stressful life events and hope will be weaker for study participants who read the Bible more often. This means we expect to find a statistical interaction effect between stress and Bible reading on hope. Following the procedures that are recommended by Aiken and West (1991), tests for this interaction were performed with ordinary least squares multiple regression analyses. All of the independent variables were centered on their means. Following this, a multiplicative term was created by multiplying the centered values of the stress by the centered values of Bible reading. Then, a test for the proposed interaction effect was conducted in two steps. First, the additive relationships between the independent variables and hope were estimated in Model 1. Second, the cross-product term was entered into the model in the second step (Model 2).

If the regression coefficient associated with the multiplicative term is statistically significant, then it is important to perform some additional calculations to see whether the proposed interaction effect is in the hypothesized direction. These additional computations are performed with a formula that is provided by Aiken and West (1991, see p. 12). Support for the first hypothesis would be found if the relationship between stress and hope becomes progressively weaker at successively higher levels of Bible reading. Although any value of Bible reading can be used in these additional computations, we selected four equally spaced scores that capture the full distribution of bible reading values: 2, 4, 6, 8. It is important to show that there are a sufficient number of cases at each of the selected data points because too few cases can result in statistical estimation problems with data sparseness (see Cohen et al. 2003, for a discussion of data sparseness). The following number of cases was observed at each of the selected bible reading scores: 2 ($N = 423$), 4 ($N = 188$), 6 ($N = 296$), and 8 ($N = 106$). As these data reveal, we did not encounter problems with data sparseness at these selected values of Bible reading. Once estimates have been derived at the selected data points, Aiken and West (1991) provide an additional formula that reveals whether these coefficients are statistically significant.

The tests for Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 were more straightforward. OLS was used in both cases. Hypothesis 2 was evaluated by regressing benevolent religious reappraisal coping scores on the religion control variables, the demographic control variables, and the frequency of Bible reading. The stress measure was not included in these analyses because, as we discussed above, questions on benevolent religious reappraisals refer specifically to the single most stressful event. Hypothesis 3 was assessed by regressing hope on the

Table 2 Assessing the relationships among bible reading, stress, and hope (N = 2873)

	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Independent variables</i>		
Age	-.059*** ^a (-.007)	-.062*** (-.007)
Sex	-.022 (-.093)	-.022 (-.091)
Education	-.044* (-.029)	-.044* (-.030)
Marital status	.027 (.112)	.028 (.117)
Church attendance	.069** (.052)	.071** (.053)
Private prayer	.105*** (.089)	.108*** (.090)
Stressful events	-.134*** (-.136)	-.132*** (-.133)
Bible reading	.034 (.029)	.035 (.031)
^b Metric (unstandardized) regression coefficient (Bible Reading X Stressful Events)	-	-
		(.029)***
Multiple R ²	.053	.058

^aStandardized regression coefficient

^bMetric (unstandardized) regression coefficient

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$;

*** $p < .001$

frequency of Bible reading, stressful life events, the interaction between reading the Bible and stress, benevolent religious coping responses, and the control variables.

Results

Table 2 contains the results of the test of Hypothesis 1. Findings from the first step of the data analysis procedures that were discussed above are provided by Model 1, whereas Model 2 contains the results that were obtained after the multiplicative term was added to the regression equation.

Two noteworthy results emerge from the estimates that were derived from Model 1. First, the data suggest that greater exposure to stressful life events is associated with a diminished sense of hope ($\beta = -.134$; $p < .001$). But in contrast, reading the Bible more often does not appear to be associated with hope ($\beta = .034$; *ns.*)²

The estimates that were derived with Model 2 are of greater interest because they contain the test for the proposed interaction between stress and Bible reading on hope. These data indicate that a significant interaction between stress and Bible reading is present in the data ($b = .029$; $p < .001$; unstandardized regression coefficients are discussed when presenting the results of tests for interaction effects because standardized effects are meaningless in this context).

² Preliminary analyses suggest that the level of exposure to stressful life events is not significantly associated with the frequency of Bible reading ($r = -.024$; *ns.*).

Following the data analyses strategy that was presented earlier, additional computations were performed at four equally spaced Bible reading scores to see whether the interaction effect is in the hypothesized direction. The results from these additional calculations are not shown in Table 2. A value of 2 represents people who read the Bible less than once a month. The additional calculations reveal that greater exposure to stressful life events among people at this level of Bible reading is associated with lower hope scores ($\beta = -.164$; $b = -.166$; $p < .001$). A score of 4 stands for people who read the Bible a few times a month. At this level of Bible reading, stress is still associated with lower hope scores ($\beta = -.106$; $b = -.108$; $p < .001$). However, the standardized estimate is about 35.4% smaller than the estimate for study participants at the previous level (i.e., those who read the Bible less than once a month). Study participants with a score of 6 say they read the Bible a few times a week. At this level, stress is not significantly associated with hope ($\beta = -.049$; $b = -.050$; *ns.*). The same is true for study participants who read the Bible several times a day (i.e., those with a score of 8) ($\beta = .008$; $b = .008$; *ns.*). Looking across the full range of scores, the data suggest that reading the Bible more often tends to fully moderate (i.e., offset) the negative relationship between stress and hope. These data therefore provide support for Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 was designed to examine one way in which the potentially beneficial effects of reading the Bible might arise. This issue was addressed by estimating the relationship between reading the Bible and relying on benevolent religious reappraisal coping responses when the most significant life event in the previous 18 months was encountered. As discussed above, this relationship was evaluated by regressing benevolent reappraisal coping scores on the frequency of Bible reading as well as age, sex, education, marital status, church attendance, and prayer. These additional analyses (not shown here) indicate that people who read the Bible more often are more likely to rely on benevolent religious reappraisal coping responses when the most stressful event was encountered ($\beta = .130$; $b = .158$; $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 3 was designed to bring the analyses full circle by assessing whether greater use of benevolent religious reappraisal coping responses is associated with greater hope. Recall that this hypothesis was evaluated by regressing hope on benevolent religious reappraisals, the frequency of reading the Bible, stress, the interaction between reading the Bible and stress, and the control variables. The findings (not shown here) suggest that people who use benevolent reappraisals to deal with the greatest stressor tend to be more hopeful ($\beta = .215$; $b = .148$; $p < .001$). Support is therefore found for Hypothesis 3. These analyses further reveal that the interaction between reading the Bible and stress is still statistically significant ($b = .024$; $p < .01$), but it is approximately 17.2% smaller than the estimate that is provided when the measure of benevolent reappraisals is not in the model (see Table 2) ($(.029 - .024 / .029) = .172$).

Discussion

Sacred texts are, arguably, the backbone of a faith tradition.³ They typically contain information on the history of a faith tradition, but, more importantly, they also contain precepts which presumably lead to a better life. Even though sacred texts are a vitally

³ Our study was conducted in the U.S. and as a result, the study participants were overwhelmingly Christian. The statement that religious texts are the backbone of a faith tradition is appropriate for those with a Judeo-Christian background. It should be emphasized, however, that religious texts may play a less central role in other faith traditions, such as Buddhism.

important part of a faith tradition, it is surprising to find that empirical research on them has lagged behind research in other substantive areas (e.g., religious coping) in the religion and health literature. The purpose of the current study was to redress this imbalance in the literature by assessing whether reading sacred texts contributes to the quality of life by providing access to potentially important coping resources. Toward this end, three hypotheses were evaluated. The first specified that the relationship between stress and hope would be weaker among people who read the Bible more often. It was proposed in the second hypothesis that people who read the Bible more often will be more likely to adopt benevolent religious reappraisal coping responses to deal with the single most troublesome life event they encountered in the previous 18 months. According to the third hypothesis, individuals who adopt benevolent religious reappraisal coping responses will be more hopeful about the future. The data from the current study provide support for each of these hypotheses.

There are three reasons why the findings from this study are noteworthy. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that assesses the potential stress-buffering function of reading sacred scriptures in the general population. Second, an effort was made to move beyond this important issue by clearly identifying one way in which reading the Bible may confer stress-related benefits: adopting benevolent religious reappraisal coping responses. Third, we examined these issues with data from a large nationally representative survey of adults.

Even though our research may have contributed to the literature, a substantial amount of work remains to be done on reading sacred scriptures. Perhaps the greatest need has to do with the measurement of this core construct. As in the current study, researchers often assess reading sacred scriptures with a single indicator (e.g., Fetzer Institute/National Institute on Aging Working Group 1999). Yet even a moments reflect reveals that reading sacred scriptures is a complex phenomenon in its own right. Briefly reflecting on research on prayer helps illustrate this point. Many researchers initially assessed prayer with a single indicator. But as this literature began to evolve, it quickly became evident that there are different types of prayer (Poloma and Gallup 1991) and different functions of prayer (Spilka and Ladd 2013). Perhaps researchers can develop a counterpart to this literature in their work on reading sacred scriptures. For example, it might be useful to devise a topology of reasons for reading the Bible. Some people might read the Bible for help in dealing with stress, but others might read sacred scriptures simply to deepen their faith, while yet other individuals may read the Bible in order to feel closer to their chosen faith, thereby deriving comfort in knowing they are part of an ongoing tradition. These (and other) reasons for reading scriptures could be measured directly and then examined in larger models to see which one(s) are associated with health-related outcomes.

Following closely on the point that was raised above, it would be helpful to identify the specific Biblical passages that people turn to when they encounter stressful events. This in turn may help flesh out our understanding about how Bible reading shapes religious coping responses. Unfortunately, our study does not contain data on the specific Biblical passages that people consult during difficult times. Gathering this type of information should be a high priority in the future.

As the data in our study reveal, Bible reading, stress, and religious coping responses do not explain all of the variance in the hope outcome measure. This suggests that hope is likely to be influenced by other aspects of religious life, as well. Research by Krause and his colleagues suggests that social relationships in the church may play an important role in this respect. More specifically Krause and Hayward (2012) report that more frequent informal support from pastors is associated with increases in hope over time. Similarly,

research by Krause, Ellison, Shaw, Marcum and Boardman (2001) indicates that more frequent informal support from fellow church members is associated with greater use of religious coping responses.

It would also be important to gather more information on the context in which Bible reading takes place. We assess Bible reading in private, but people also attend Bible study groups. It would be helpful to see whether reading the Bible in groups conveys a similar or even greater benefit than reading the Bible privately.

In order to advance research on reading the Bible, investigators should also address the limitations in the work we have presented. At least two shortcomings are in need of attention. First, the data for our study are cross-sectional. Consequently, the causal ordering among the constructs in our models was based on theoretical considerations alone. For example, we assumed that people who rely on benevolent religious reappraisals are subsequently more likely to feel hopeful about the future. But one might just as easily argue that people who are initially more hopeful are subsequently more likely to adopt this type of coping response. Longitudinal data are needed to address this, as well as other causal assumptions in our work. Second, only one specific coping response was examined in our study. However, as Pargament et al. (2000) show, individuals may adopt a wide range of coping responses when they are confronted by an unwanted stressor. Some of these coping responses may be especially useful in research on reading sacred scriptures (e.g., collaborative religious coping, seeking spiritual support). Clearly, examining the relationship between reading the Bible and a full spectrum of coping responses will likely yield much greater insight into the potential benefits of this core religious behavior.

In recent years, the theories and measures that are used in the study of religion have become increasingly sophisticated. We applaud these efforts as long as more fundamental aspects of religious life are not overlooked. If our study accomplishes anything, we hope it calls attention to one of the most basic elements of involvement in virtually any faith tradition—reading sacred scriptures.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest Neal Krause and Kenneth I. Pargament declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committees and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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