

God Is My Co-Pilot

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Slate:

When it comes to taming destructive impulses, God may be your best bet. Just ask those who have turned their lives around through Alcoholics Anonymous. AA's iconic 12 steps are unabashedly spiritual, directing members to surrender their agency to a higher power in exchange for the strength to overcome their drinking-related demons. Though not everyone agrees with its focus on spirituality, AA is still the world's most-used program for addiction recovery.

The faith-based approach is no coincidence. Studies show that increasing spiritual practice can lead to decreased alcohol use, while teenagers who practice religion regularly are more likely to avoid risky behaviors such as cigarette smoking, unprotected sex, and experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

But those aren't the only types of risks people engage in.

In a new study in *Psychological Science*, Stanford University researchers found that a belief in God can actually have the opposite effect: Faith in a higher power can encourage people to take *greater* risks than they would normally. The key distinction is the nature of the risk. When they examined past studies, the researchers realized that most of the risky behaviors that had been looked at—drinking, gambling, smoking—tended to have a moral dimension.

Read the whole story: [Slate](#)