

SESSION 13 • SHORTER READING • ABOUT 5 MINUTES

WHYZMEN • SESSION 13

Why Serve? What the Research Says

Five findings on service and the second half, and one honest caveat

Credit: A WhyzMen summary of peer-reviewed studies (sources at the end). Most draw on the Health and Retirement Study, which has followed about 20,000 Americans over fifty since 1992.

Why it is here: Your triad project is the first time the brotherhood does something rather than talks about something. This is the evidence that the doing is good for the doer too: Grant's Myth 3, measured in blood pressure, brain scans and years of life.

Framing

Most men here already believe service is right. Fewer know it is also good medicine. The findings below are consistent enough to state plainly, and honest enough to state carefully.

The five findings

Finding	What the studies found
1 • Longer life.	A 2013 review of the research found volunteers had about a 24% <i>lower risk of dying</i> , after accounting for health (Okun, 2013). In a Harvard study of about 13,000 adults over fifty, two hours a week went with a 44% lower risk of dying over four years, more purpose and less loneliness (Kim, 2020).
2 • A healthier heart.	At Carnegie Mellon, here in Pittsburgh, adults aged 51 to 91 who volunteered at least 200 hours a year were 40% less likely to develop high blood pressure over four years than non-volunteers (Sneed & Cohen, 2013).
3 • Slower aging.	Volunteers' blood showed <i>slower biological aging</i> on an epigenetic clock. Retirees benefited at one to four hours a week (Kim, Halvorsen et al., 2025).
4 • A sharper brain.	In Baltimore's Experience Corps, retirees tutored children to read in public schools at least 15 hours a week. In a randomized trial, <i>the men's brains grew modestly over two years</i> , memory center included, while the control group's shrank (Carlson, 2015). An earlier study, co-authored by Marc Freedman, found more strength and more people to turn to (Fried, 2004).

Finding	What the studies found
5 • The motive matters.	Older adults who volunteered <i>for the sake of others</i> had lower mortality four years later. Those who volunteered mainly for their own benefit fared no better than non-volunteers (Konrath, 2012).

How much is enough?

The numbers cluster at two to four hours a week: one morning. Nobody in these studies needed a title or a board seat. But the Baltimore tutors were not stacking chairs; they were teaching children to read. Use your gifts, not just your hours.

The honest caveat

Most of these studies observe rather than prove: healthier men may simply volunteer more. Researchers adjust for health, and the Baltimore study assigned people at random, so its findings carry the most weight. And finding 5 closes the loophole: serving in order to live longer seems to be the one motive that does not help. Serve because someone needs you; the benefit is a by-product.

Where it shows up in WhyzMen

- **Your triad project (Session 13)** is the first dose: one outward act, with a date and a convener. A weekly service line in your Rule makes it a habit rather than an event.
- **Finding 5 is the Jubilee point.** Leviticus built generosity into the harvest itself (gleaning, 19:9–10). The research arrives from the other direction: the gift is only medicine when it is a gift. Pairs with Grant’s Myth 3: the giver gains.

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.” — Acts 20:35

Sources: Okun, Yeung & Brown, *Psychology and Aging* 28(2), 2013 • Kim, Whillans, Lee, Chen & VanderWeele, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 59(2), 2020 • Sneed & Cohen, *Psychology and Aging* 28(2), 2013 • Kim, Halvorsen, Potter & Faul, *Social Science & Medicine*, 2025 • Carlson et al., *Alzheimer’s & Dementia* 11(11), 2015 • Fried et al., *Journal of Urban Health* 81(1), 2004 • Konrath, Fuhrel-Forbis, Lou & Brown, *Health Psychology* 31(1), 2012.

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