

The Wired Word for 10/19/2025

1 message

The Wired Word <lesson@thewiredword.com>
Reply-To: ST THOMAS <cheryl.ausband@me.com>
To: communications@stthomaschesapeake.org

Thu, Oct 16, 2025 at 12:30 PM

Dear Class Members,

What is the secret to happiness? According to recent research, happiness comes from being religious, gathering with others, and spending time in places of worship. The implications of these findings will be the topic of this week's installment of *The Wired Word*.



Religious People Happier Than Non-Religious People

The Wired Word for the Week of October 19, 2025

In the News

Religious people "self-identify as happier than non-religious people," reports Ryan Burge in *Graphs about Religion*. "There's just no mistaking that conclusion." The 2023-2024 Pew Religious Landscape Survey asked respondents the question: "Generally, how happy are you with your life these days?" Among the 37,000 people who responded, 28% said they were very happy, 58% were pretty happy, and only 13% were not too happy. When participation in religion was factored in, there was a noticeable increase in overall happiness.

The survey revealed that happiness increases along with attendance at worship. People who attend a house of worship on a yearly basis are six percentage points more likely to be very happy compared to people who never attend. Monthly attenders are three percentage points happier than yearly attenders. Weekly attenders are four percentage points happier than monthly attenders. Concludes Burge: "The most religiously active are easily the happiest."

A sobering dimension of this survey is that only 8% of the people surveyed fall into the weekly attendance (or more frequent attendance) category. Half of the survey group attends worship seldom or never. But 43% of the people who are the most religious are "very happy," compared to 22% of those who are not religious. The study also found that Christians are more likely to be "very happy" than members of other world religions or people who are not religious.

How about the effect of watching worship services online? "The folks who watch services online are happier than those who don't consume any online religious programming," reports Burge. But there is little evidence that online worship can replace in-person worship, at least in terms of happiness. "Going to a house of worship in person on a regular basis has a demonstrably large impact on personal happiness," concludes Burge. "Attending online does seem to increase happiness as well, but the effect is much more muted."

Another study found that people enjoy doing things together, which connects with the happiness that people find in attendance at worship. New research published in *Social Psychological and Personality Sciences* found that many people enjoy spending time around others, even doing activities that are not traditionally seen as being social.

Yahoo reports that researchers analyzed 105,766 activity episodes from 41,094 people who participated in the American Time Use Survey (a U.S. Census Bureau study that collects data on how people spend their time). Activities that people typically do with others, such as eating and drinking, were understandably linked with more happiness. But there were also some activities such as reading and cleaning, traditionally done alone, that increased feelings of happiness when done with others. "Every activity was significantly more enjoyable with other people," the researchers concluded.

People are social by nature, said Dr. Aaron P. Brinen, assistant professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. "We're designed to thrive in social groups," he said. "Doing things with others taps into our biological need for connection." It is no surprise that the Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, is a word that simply means "gathering" or "assembly."

[TWW Team Member Bill Tammeus writes](#) that religious people "are more likely to be surrounded by a supportive community that can share their load. It's certainly possible to be a lone wolf inside a religious congregation but it strikes me as more likely (and much of this comes from my own experience) that they feel part of a group of people who try, however imperfectly, to love and support one another."

Religion grounds people in practices that provide structure and comfort. Marriage and funerals are offered in a variety of religions, along with baptism, confirmation and Communion in the Christian tradition. Even the Lord's Prayer can have benefits -- Tammeus says "to be saying the same prayer today that, by the scriptural account, Jesus taught to his disciples 2,000 years ago can be a source of comfort and, thus, happiness."

The Washington Post reports that four recent surveys, taken between 2010 and 2021, have asked people how meaningful certain activities are to them, and how happy they feel when they do them. The activities are graded on a six-point scale, and the most meaningful and happiness-inducing are religious and spiritual activities. They get a score of 5.1.

And how about places of worship? The surveys have also looked at locations, and have found that places of worship are ranked as being very happy places. They get a score of 5.2 points, while at the bottom are banks, with a score of 3.8 points. For many people, churches are among the happiest places on earth.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Religious People Are Happier Than Non-Religious People. *Graphs about Religion*](#)

[Scientists Reveal the Simple Secret to Feeling Happier -- And It's Not What You Think. *Yahoo*](#)

[The Happiest, Least Stressful, Most Meaningful Jobs in America. *The Washington Post*](#)

Applying the News Story

Reflect on the happiness you find in your faith, the benefits you gain from gathering with others, and the value you find in spending time in church.

The Big Questions

1. What makes you the happiest? In what places do you find joy? Be specific.
2. When do you most enjoy gathering with others? What do you like to do alone? When, if ever, do you like to have people around you when you are performing an activity that is traditionally done alone?
3. How do you feel when you enter your place of worship? What happiness do you find there that is not available elsewhere? Name the dimensions of life in church that give you joy.
4. What can your congregation do to increase the happiness of church members and guests? Why is this important, if at all?

5. The practice of the Christian faith certainly evokes feelings beyond happiness. What are they, and why are they important in a life of discipleship?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Nehemiah 8:10

Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD, and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." (For context, read [Nehemiah 8:1-10](#).)

The book of Nehemiah tells the story of the people of Judah, back in Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon. Their governor Nehemiah led them in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and instituting social and religious reforms, and the priest Ezra stood and read from scripture while the people listened.

The people hung on Ezra's every word, and the Hebrew text was interpreted by leaders standing nearby. You see, even though Ezra was reading the Scriptures loud and clear, the people could not understand them completely until they were interpreted in the more familiar Aramaic language. Like worshipers today, they needed scripture to be read and interpreted. A group of leaders helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places.

The people of Jerusalem gathered beneath a wooden platform and listened to the law of God being read. They knew that to "understand" the Bible means, quite literally, to "stand under" the Bible -- to place ourselves under its authority, to take it personally, to allow our lives to be shaped by it and to give it our trust and our confidence. Then Nehemiah told them to go off and celebrate, because "the joy of the LORD is your strength." The Word of God, both read and interpreted, can refresh our souls and guide our steps.

Questions: How do you benefit from the Word of God being read and interpreted in a service of worship? Where do you find happiness in a worship gathering? When, if ever, have you found strength in "the joy of the LORD"?

Psalms 22:22

I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you ... (For context, read [Psalm 22:22-25](#).)

Psalms 22 is a song of lament, a passionate expression of grief or sorrow. It begins with the cry for help that Jesus offered from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (v. 1). But the psalm also includes several declarations of confidence (vv. 3-5, 9-11), along with an expression of assurance that God hears and responds (vv. 22-25).

This final section begins with the promise, "I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters." The psalmist makes a commitment to testify to God's deliverance, with the intention to praise God "in the midst of the congregation." The writer is grateful, saying that God "did not hide his face from me but heard when I cried to him" (v. 24).

Questions: What feelings arise from declaring confidence in God, and speaking about his help? Why is it good to do this "in the midst of the congregation," instead of alone? How does faith in God increase your comfort and joy?

Luke 11:1

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." (For context, read [Luke 11:1-10](#).)

The gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus was praying "in a certain place" one day -- a very happy place for him. After he finished this spiritual activity -- number one on the happiness scale -- one of his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray." This disciple wanted to get better at prayer, so that he could enjoy the happiness and

stress relief that comes from praying well. Jesus agreed, because he wanted his disciples to pray in a way that drew them closer to God, with a sense of happiness and peace that cannot be found anywhere else.

So, Jesus said to his disciples, "When you pray, say: Father" (v. 2). Or, "Our Father in heaven." Over time, the prayer evolved into the version often used today, "Our Father, who art in heaven." Regardless of the exact wording, the teaching is that prayer creates a personal connection to the God who is as close to us as a loving parent. But this parent is not trapped in the world that we live in, as our earthly parents are. No, God is our Father *in heaven* -- God rules eternally from an infinite spiritual kingdom, caring for those of us who live in this finite physical world.

Jesus goes on to say that we should ask God for what we need for life. "Give us each day our daily bread" (v. 3). "And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial" (v. 4). Daily bread, forgiveness of sin, avoidance of trials and temptations: All of these are legitimate needs. God wants to give us what we need.

Since God is a loving parent, we can trust that our prayers will be answered and our needs will be met -- Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you" (v. 9). God wants us to be happy. God wants to reduce our stress. God wants to fill our lives with meaning. And that is why the happiest place on earth is reached by connecting with God through prayer.

Questions: How does prayer draw you closer to God, and give you a sense of happiness and peace? What requests do you make of God in prayer? How has God answered your prayers and met your needs? Be specific.

Acts 11:26

... So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians." (For context, read [Acts 11:19-26](#).)

In the early days of the church, the followers of Jesus were fleeing Jerusalem because of the persecution of Stephen. They scattered throughout the Mediterranean region, and some ended up in Antioch, which is in modern-day Turkey. Initially, the refugees from Jerusalem gathered only with people who shared their Jewish background. But there were also some followers of Jesus who had their roots in Cyprus and Cyrene. When they came to Antioch, they spoke to the non-Jewish Hellenists also, and they proclaimed "the Lord Jesus" (v. 20).

Acts tells us that the "hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord" (v. 21). Antioch is often called the cradle of Christianity because it played such an important role in the emergence of the Christian faith. It started with people simply coming together as followers of Jesus Christ.

The congregation, Barnabas and Saul met together, learned from each other, and encouraged each other. It was a life-giving time, and Acts tells us that it was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called "Christians." This initial use of the word "Christian" is an important historical event, but it is equally significant that Barnabas and Saul met with a group called "the church." This is only the sixth time in the entire book of Acts that the word "church" is used.

The word "church" is important because it means "assembly" or "gathering." In the New Testament, the Greek word is *ekklesia*, which literally means "the called out ones" -- a group of people who have been called out to a meeting. When you say you are going to church, you are really saying that you are going to an assembly, a gathering, a meeting. The line from Acts which says, "they met with the church" (v. 26) could also be translated as "they associated with the association," or "they assembled with the assembly," or "they gathered with the gathering" or "they met with the meeting."

Questions: How are you inspired by gathering with other members of the church? When has your happiness been increased by coming together with followers of Jesus? What other assemblies are life-giving to you?

For Further Discussion

1. David Williams, a novelist and a pastor, has written a book called *The Prayer of Unwanting: How the Lord's Prayer Helps Us Get Over Ourselves -- And Why That Might Be a Good Thing*. He knows that we have a lot of desires -- success, safety, wealth, health, love. We often use prayer to ask for these things. But the Lord's Prayer gives us an opportunity to think more about God and less about ourselves. When we say, "Father, may your name be revered as holy," we are focusing more on God than on ourselves. We are asking not for earthly health or wealth or success, but for heavenly holiness. Williams knows that there is a big lack of holy awareness in this world, even among Christians. So, in this line of the prayer, Jesus is inviting us to let go of our earthly anxieties and gaze at God's holiness. When have you gazed at God's holiness in prayer? What happened? How did it change your mood, if at all?
2. St. Augustine believed that humans have a "God-shaped hole" in their hearts that can only be filled by God. This restlessness and emptiness is not a result of sin but is due to being created for a relationship with God. "When we find and rest in God," says TWW Team Member Mary Sells, "we fill the empty space that nothing else fits." How has this been true, for you, if ever?
3. TWW Team Member Henry Brinton preached at Calvary Presbyterian Church in Alexandria, Virginia, on its 75th anniversary in 2023. He said, "You have been gathering as a community since 1948, and this experience of coming together is such an important spiritual activity. It is something that was not possible for us during the pandemic, and we all missed it so very much. For the church, coming together in person is life-giving, and this has been true since the first days of the church." What did you miss most about the church during the pandemic? Where do you find the greatest value in being able to gather as a community of faith?
4. Psalm 84 speaks of the joy of worship in God's temple: "How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God" (vv. 1-2). What is most lovely about your place of worship? When does your soul long to be in church? How does an experience of "the living God" give you feelings of joy?

Responding to the News

This week, give thanks for the opportunity to practice your faith, and reflect on the happiness that comes from it. Look for an opportunity to gather with others for worship, Bible study or a small group experience. Offer your church a portion of your time, talent and energy, in support of its ministry and mission.

Prayer

We thank you, God, for the happiness that comes from the practice of the Christian faith. May we not neglect to gather together, but instead seek opportunities to join our hearts and minds in worship and service. We offer all this in a spirit of joy and thanksgiving, in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

Copyright 2025 Communication Resources

[Unsubscribe From This List](#)