

# Highly religious people happier than others

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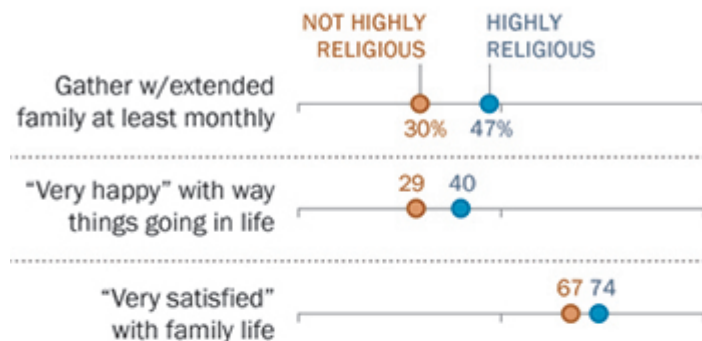
WASHINGTON (RNS)—Three in 10 Americans claim they are pretty satisfied with life, happy, healthy and moral. They're the "highly religious" 30 percent of U.S. adults who say they pray daily and attend church at least once a week.

"Religion in Everyday Life," a new survey from Pew Research, teases out the particular ways they differ from the majority of U.S. Christians who are less observant and from non-Christians, including the "nones" who claim no religious identity.

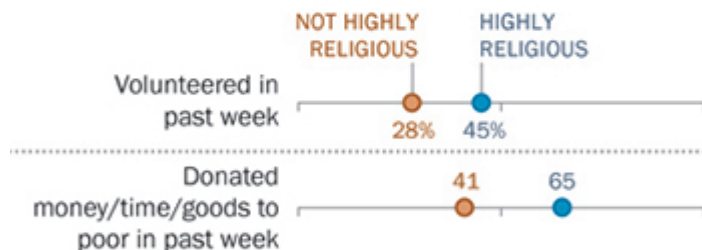
The highly religious are overwhelmingly—95 percent—Protestant, Catholic or Mormon. Nearly half—49 percent—are white evangelicals. Most of the overall group—62 percent—are women.

## Highly religious adults more engaged with family, more likely to volunteer and happier overall

### Family life and overall happiness



### Volunteering and community involvement



Note: "Highly religious" respondents are defined as those who say they pray daily and attend religious services at least once a week. All other respondents are coded as "not highly religious."

Source: Data on satisfaction with family life, overall happiness and volunteering from 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. All other data from a supplemental survey conducted Aug. 11-Sept. 3, 2014.

"Religion in Everyday Life"

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And many are smiling. Four in 10 highly religious people say they're "very happy" with the way things are going in life, compared to 29 percent of

people who are not highly religious.

But “we don’t know why they are happier” or more satisfied with their health, said Pew researcher Besheer Mohamed, a co-author of the report.

“We see the patterns, but we don’t know what is causing what. Is it that regular churchgoers get something from the church practice and involvement, or is it that a certain sort of person is more likely to go to worship more frequently?” he said.

### **Satisfied with family life**

Nearly three in four—74 percent—highly religious people say they’re “very satisfied with family life” compared to 67 percent of those who are not highly religious.

And 47 percent say they gather with extended family at least monthly, compared to 30 percent of those not highly religious.

## Most people rely on own research when making major life decisions; highly religious also rely on prayer

Percent who say they rely “a lot” on \_\_\_\_ when making major life decisions



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Source: 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study supplemental survey conducted Aug. 11-Sept. 3, 2014.

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The less religious also may be prayerful folks who attend worship less frequently or people with no religious affiliation who value moral behavior. The report points out many say “attributes such as gratitude, forgiveness and honesty are essential” to what being religious or moral means to them personally.

Still, the survey finds many similarities in beliefs and behavior between the

two groups.

- **Few rely on clergy.**

Rather than consult a pastor or priest, 82 percent of the highly religious and less religious rely on their own research when making important decisions; 45 percent turn to prayer and personal reflection; 43 percent to family; 25 percent to professional experts; but only 15 percent to religious leaders.

“It’s the age of Google and consulting your own conscience or Aunt Susie,” said Boston University sociology professor Nancy Ammerman, an adviser to Pew on the research.

- **Believers don’t act on their faith in the marketplace.**

Fewer than 30 percent, highly religious or not and across all traditions, say they pay attention to a company’s environmental record or to whether it pays fair wages before making purchases. Bringing religious views to economic choices “is still very low, no matter where you look,” she said.

- **Couch potatoes are “very satisfied with their health.”**

The highly religious also admit they overeat about as often and don’t exercise much more than the seven in 10 Americans whose everyday lives are less shaped by religiosity.

Pew also asked people what they saw as the essentials of their faith or philosophy.

“Christians are about equally likely to cite moral behaviors as vital to their Christian identity as they are to mention explicitly religious behaviors,” the report concluded.

**Among Christians, the top five of 16 beliefs and behaviors were:**

- Belief in God (86 percent).
- Gratitude for what they have (71 percent).
- Forgiving others who wronged them (69 percent).
- Honesty (67 percent).
- Praying regularly (63 percent).

At the bottom: Living a healthy lifestyle and resting on the Sabbath each were cited by only 18 percent. Only 14 percent said being Christian means “buying from companies that pay a fair wage.”

Among the 27 percent who said they were religiously unaffiliated, the top five criteria for a moral life were similar, minus God:

- Being honest at all times (58 percent).
- Being grateful for what they have (53 percent).
- Committing to spend time with family (47 percent).
- Forgiving others who wronged them (39 percent).
- Working to protect the environment (35 percent).

Another noteworthy divide between the highly religious and the other 70 percent of Americans: The most faithful were more likely to admit that they told a “white lie” in the prior week—45 percent compared to 39 percent among the less religious.

“Maybe they just have a greater sense of introspection or conscience,” Ammerman said. “Maybe they are more empathetic and attuned to other people’s feelings. Or maybe they’re just more willing to tell” that they had lied.

The report draws on two major sources. The basis for most of the demographic data is the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study, based on a telephone survey of 35,000 adults that has a margin of error of plus or minus 1 percentage point. A second survey, delving into beliefs and behavior, was conducted among 3,278 members of Pew’s American Trends

Panel, and it has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.6 percentage points. There were too few interviews to break out findings about minority religions or among members of historically black Protestant churches.

*Cathy Lynn Grossman is senior national reporter for RNS*