

Study: Having Church Friends Makes You Happy

✖ Are you going to church regularly? Do you have a few good friends in the congregation? A new study concludes those are two keys to a happier life.

Just how important is the friend factor at church? A study released in the December issue of the *American Sociological Review* finds that even going to church services several times a year can boost your sense of well-being—if you have a circle of friends there who you identify with belief-wise.

“Our study offers compelling evidence that it is the social aspects of religion rather than theology or spirituality that leads to life satisfaction,” says Chaeyoon Lim, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who led the study titled *Religion, Social Networks and Life Satisfaction*. “In particular, we find that friendships built in religious congregations are the secret ingredient in religion that makes people happier.”

Lim’s study reveals that 33 percent of people who attend church every week—and have between three and five close friends—are “extremely satisfied” in life. By contrast, only 19 percent of people who attend church every week—but don’t have close friends there—are extremely satisfied. Meanwhile, 23 percent of people who limit churchgoing to several times a year—but have between three and five close friends there—are extremely satisfied with their lives.

“To me, the evidence substantiates that it is not really going to church and listening to sermons or praying that makes people happier, but making church-based friends and building intimate social networks there,” Lim says.

“One of the important functions of religion is to give people

a sense of belonging to a moral community based on religious faith," Lim continues. "This community, however, could be abstract and remote unless one has an intimate circle of friends who share a similar identity. The friends in one's congregation thus make the religious community real and tangible, and strengthen one's sense of belonging to the community."

What about you? Do you agree that the friends you have at church make the difference? Let me know what you think in the comment box below.