

Scroll down for the “middle level” version

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July 8, 2022 ~ **What Makes Americans Happy** (Lesson c46)



Warm up:

Look at the three photos above. Call out some things that each one could symbolize. (Hints: What are the people doing, and who is doing it? Where is the flag and what does it symbolize to Americans? What is behind the person holding a plate, and who did she make the treats for?)

**Phrases and proverbs:**

Remember: **sth** = something; **sb** = somebody.

roughly = approximately

what matters most = what is most important; what is most significant

It's more blessed to give than to receive. = You feel happier when you give something to people, than when you receive something from people.

Live life to the fullest. = Live your life in the most meaningful and most satisfying way.

Treat others the way you want others to treat you. [Sometimes called “the golden rule”] = do good things to other people and/or treat them kindly, because that is the way you want others to act toward you

According to surveys by the National Opinion Research Center, the key to happiness for most Americans is a life that includes hard work, marriage, faith, charity, and freedom.

**Work** When people across America were asked, “If you had enough money to live comfortably for the rest of your life, would you stop working?” less than one third of the people answered yes. Most Americans *like* or even *love* their work. Around 89 percent of working people said they were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their jobs. This isn't true just for people with high-paying and highly skilled jobs; it's true for all jobs. In many countries, people cannot easily change jobs, or obtain skills needed for a better job. Perhaps this is one reason why so many people want to come to America.

**Marriage** 42 percent of married Americans said they were very happy. Just 23 percent of never-married people said they were very happy. On the other hand, 58 percent of married Americans did not say they were very happy. Many people believe that more things could be done to improve marital happiness.

**Faith** Roughly 85 percent of Americans believe in a religion, and (before COVID) about one third of Americans reported going to a place of worship at least once a week. 43 percent of religious people said they were very happy with their lives, compared with 23 percent of non-religious people. In most cases, people practice their faith together as a family; the resulting *family unity* may be one reason why people think their religion makes them happier.

**Charity** People who give *money* to charity are 43 percent more likely than non-givers to say they are very happy. Volunteers (people who give *time*) are 42 percent more likely to be very happy than non-volunteers. The more people give, the happier they are. Even in economic hard times, Americans give their time and money, just because they believe that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

**Freedom** America's National Anthem proclaims that America is "the land of the free," so freedom is a strong cultural value. People who feel completely free or very free were twice as likely as those who don't feel very free to say they are very happy about their lives. This included economic freedom, political freedom, and religious freedom.

Research tells us that what matters most for happiness is not having a lot of things, but having good values that promote family life, faith, charity, freedom and a strong work ethic. Without these values, our lives will have less meaning and joy.

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### **Discussion Questions:**

*(If you have questions about the content of the article, please ask now.)*

1. Were you surprised by anything in the article? Do you think that something else should be added to the five things mentioned? Explain.
2. Choose one, and give your opinion about which can make most people happier:
  - a. being married, or being single? Why?
  - b. having religious faith, or being an atheist? Why?
  - c. having a job, or not having a job? Why?
3. This article says: "The more people give, the happier they are." (This is talking about giving your money and/or giving your time to help other people.) Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. What is the relationship/connection between personal freedom and personal responsibility? Give an example.
5. Give one specific example of when personal freedom **helps** that person's happiness. Also, give one specific example of when personal freedom **hurts** that person's happiness.
6. What are 1-2 keys to **your own** happiness? Also, **why** are those things important for your own happiness?
7. If you think that the people in your own country would have given different answers to the "happiness" survey, please tell us what might be different. (**Why** do you or people from your country think that those other things are important for happiness?)
8. The end of this article says: "Research tells us that what matters most for happiness is not having a lot of things, but having good values." Do you agree? Why or why not?

If you have more time, read and discuss these verses from the Bible. Can you give an example of one of these, and/or of "the golden rule"?

~ In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' " ~ (Acts 20:35 ESV)

~ "The thief enters only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest." Jesus (John 10:10 CEV)

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*middle level" version follows*

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**Proverbs:** (match these common sayings with the values mentioned in the article)

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These lessons were created or adapted by the staff of International Friendship Ministries, P.O. Box 12504, Columbia SC 29211; ifmusa.org; info@ifmusa.org. IFM is grateful to Kathy Williams for most of the original work. Some lessons were adapted from EFLsuccess.com (with permission). IFM makes these lessons available to our participants, but this does not imply our consent for others to publish these lessons online or in print without permission.

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