

WHAT DOES **SPIRITUALITY** MEAN TO US?

*A Study of Spirituality
in the United States*



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ABOUT THE STUDY

“I think it’s a general part of the human experience, that we’re all spiritual in some way. It shapes the way that you believe, and the way that you present your beliefs to others.”

Grayce, 19

Moderately spiritual / Slightly religious (Christian)

INTRODUCTION

Fetzer’s mission—to help build the spiritual foundation for a loving world—is rooted in the conviction that we are intrinsically spiritual beings. In much of Fetzer’s work, spirituality is a central, vital, and unifying force for promoting the positive flourishing of both individuals and society. Because of this core conviction, we have a long-standing commitment to supporting research that deepens our understanding of spirituality and how it can animate concrete and positive change. Our mission compels us to learn about the myriad manifestations of spirituality and then—based on those learnings—to discern how they can be better cultivated and engaged for personal and societal well-being.

Rigorous independent research is a significant part of the Fetzer Institute legacy. This study on what spirituality means to us today extends this legacy significantly. It will help us all to better understand the human world in which we live and, importantly, lay a base that can help to guide our strategies to transform our shared world into one that welcomes and supports us all.

Based on decades of Fetzer experience, and confirmed by this study, there is both a depth and diversity of spirituality within and outside faith traditions that isn’t yet reflected in our main cultural narratives.

Paradoxically, recognizing this diversity allows a common thread to emerge, one that reveals that it is human to be spiritual and that engaging this spirituality can engender a greater good.

Throughout this report you will find illuminating examples of rich and diverse spiritual lives, ones that share more in common than we may have realized. The data make clear that spirituality is important for most Americans and is an essential part of their lives:

- More than eight out of ten people consider themselves spiritual to some extent.
- Six in ten people aspire to be more spiritual—and the more spiritual or religious people see themselves, the more likely they aspire to be even more spiritual.
- Nearly half of people say they have become more spiritual over the course of their lives.
- Most engage in at least one spiritual or religious activity every week.



Bob Boisture
President and CEO
Fetzer Institute

“
Recognizing this diversity allows a common thread to emerge, one that reveals that it is human to be spiritual and that engaging this spirituality can engender a greater good.”

Interestingly, the more spirituality is important for people, the more it is desired. People who already feel that spirituality (and religion) is central to their life want it to be more central. These findings help equip stakeholders and storytellers of all kinds to investigate the nuances behind people’s diverse spiritual identities; to invite people of all spiritual and religious backgrounds into conversation about what spirituality means to them; and—ultimately—to understand how it can contribute positively to our world. This is an essential first step for building a coalition of understanding and acceptance of diverse spiritual orientations.

From Inner to Outer

Human beings yearn for a spirituality that will root us in the love, courage, and hope that we need to build our lives and communities. We believe that people’s inner experiences of spirituality and their outer social lives long to be connected. Establishing this connection is essential for harvesting spirituality’s rich potential for personal and societal transformation.

We intentionally designed the study to map the bridge between personal spirituality and care for community, precisely so that we would learn more about the connection between the two.



We are encouraged:

People who feel highly connected to a higher power or to humanity at large are more likely to take community, civic, and political action.

The more people identify as spiritual or religious, the more likely they are to:

- Believe it's important to make a difference in their communities and "contribute to greater good" in the world.
- Engage with others in their communities and to take actions such as volunteering and donating.
- Vote, speak out on political and social issues, and get involved in politics and social movements.

There are findings in the study that suggest participants understand that humans are inherently relational. As we ponder these findings, we can see that they point to a deep connectivity in multiple directions: to a higher power, the natural world, and other people, even as they also return attention to a deeper connection to ourselves. But we also see there is ambiguity in how spirituality is understood in relationship to connectivity, especially in relationship to the outer world. To achieve the great potential of spiritual agency there is still much work to be done.

While many did not initially see the connection between their spiritual and religious lives and their actions in the world, once in conversation, their awareness often shifted quickly. Many participants linked their spirituality to practical issues in a way they hadn't considered before, suggesting that those who have not yet connected their inner and outer lives are ripe to do so. Also, those who told us they were neither religious nor spiritual discovered through conversation that, in fact, spirituality showed up in their lives. This is an honest and respectful conversation we all need to have among ourselves, for the health of our country, and for a more loving world.

Our challenges are many. Our communities are fraying. We seem more apart than together. We are threatened by a global pandemic as we become more aware of the many inequities and social divides that beleaguer our country. Our ideological conflicts are painfully separating us at precisely the time we need to be coming together.

“

Strengthening a living bridge between our inner and outer lives is the key to both personal and societal flourishing.”

So, let us begin where we are:

Our deepest levels of freedom and agency are spiritual, and we are becoming more aware that our inner and outer lives cannot be separated.

Through the study, we've learned that spirituality is linked to our deepest identities and to our personal fulfillment, and simultaneously provides a profound agency to build the common good. Strengthening a living bridge between our inner and outer lives is the key to both personal and societal flourishing. If the study makes clear that we have great spiritual potential, it also makes clear the work ahead—work that lies at the heart of the Fetzer mission and the work of many of our partners. This is the work of going deeper within ourselves to find the love, hope, and courage essential both to our own flourishing and our ability to contribute to the flourishing of others; it is the work of building a more loving world for all.



Bob Boisture

President and CEO

Fetzer Institute



OVERVIEW

This study sought to better understand spirituality in the U.S. today by asking people about how they understand and experience spirituality for themselves, and how their spirituality relates to the way they engage with others and their community. This effort included people inside and outside religious institutions, those who consider themselves spiritual, and those who do not. Using interviews, focus group conversations, and a survey of a cross-section of the U.S., we learned:



Key Findings

1. Most people consider themselves spiritual to some extent, and say that spirituality is important in their lives. That said, spiritual identity—that is, calling oneself spiritual—is only one of many measures of what it means to live a spiritual life.
2. For many, spirituality also represents the type of person they want to be: People are becoming more spiritual over their own lives, see being spiritual as an aspiration to strive for, and describe spiritual people in positive terms.
3. People identify a wide range of experiences and activities as spiritual, and they are regularly engaging in them or seeking them out both within and outside religious institutions.
4. Spirituality is connected with an engaged civic life: People who identify as highly spiritual are more likely to say it is important to make a difference in their communities and contribute to greater good in the world. They are also more likely to be politically engaged.
5. People varied in how much they connected their own spirituality with the way they engage in the world. In focus group conversations about this relationship, participants who identified as having a spiritually driven outer life often opened others' eyes to a connection between their own spirituality and the actions they take.
6. The study surfaced two bridges that connect spirituality and prosocial action: a strong sense of connection to all of humanity, and a sense of accountability to a higher power.

RESEARCH PROCESS AND DESIGN



We designed the research process to listen for and reflect what spirituality means to people of many walks of life across the United States.

The research began with focus groups and interviews to hear how people understood and saw spirituality in general and in their own lives, and how spirituality relates to civic life.

We recruited people for focus groups and in-depth interviews according to their spiritual and religious self-identification, with an interest in the similarities and differences among people who self-identify with the same spiritual and religious labels to better understand the meaning and limits of them.

We then conducted a nationally representative survey to assess quantitatively the themes that emerged from focus groups and interviews. Question categories and

phrasing reflected, as much as possible, the language and ideas that participants used in the qualitative research. Whenever appropriate, the survey asked respondents parallel questions about both spirituality and religion (e.g., “How often do you engage in the following as spiritual activities?” and, “How often do you engage in the following as religious activities?”).

Throughout this report, we use terms that individuals and researchers may define in different ways. As much as possible, this report reflects the language research participants used themselves. All direct quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from focus groups or interviews. They are labeled with the respondent’s spiritual and religious self-identification as they answered during recruiting screening questions.¹ Quote labels also include the respondent’s religion, if and how they provided it—and whether or not they identified as religious. Quotes have been edited for clarity and length.

Focus Groups

We hosted 16 two-hour focus groups in Birmingham, Alabama; Boston, Massachusetts; Des Moines, Iowa; Phoenix, Arizona; and Seattle, Washington. Focus groups were conducted in fall 2018 and spring 2019, and facilitated by a professional moderator.

Recruiting

Spiritual and religious: 5 groups
Spiritual but not religious: 5 groups
Neither spiritual nor religious: 2 groups
Religious but not spiritual: 3 groups
Mixed spiritual and religious: 1 group

In-depth Interviews

26 one-hour life-history format interviews in fall 2018 and spring 2019. Participants were recruited through NORC's AmeriSpeak® Panel.

Recruiting

13 interviewees identified as spiritual and religious
9 interviewees identified as spiritual but not religious
4 interviewees identified as neither spiritual nor religious

National Survey of Adults in the U.S.

U.S. general population age 18+ survey of 3,609 people (3,256 by web and 353 by phone) from January 16 to February 3, 2020, conducted in English and fielded by NORC at the University of Chicago. Respondents were identified through NORC's AmeriSpeak® Panel, a nationally representative, probability-based panel of the U.S. household population.

Note that, for simplicity, we round to whole numbers in survey response data throughout. Thus, charts do not always add up to exactly 100%.

More detail is available in Appendix I, and the full quantitative data set is available at the Association of Religion Data Archives (www.TheARDA.com).

Information Key

Throughout the report, we use the following icons to denote different types of data collected from the research:

[R][S] Respondents who identify as both religious and spiritual to some extent

[R] Respondents who identify as religious to some extent

[S] Respondents who identify as spiritual to some extent

R S Respondents who identify as both not religious at all, and not spiritual at all

“ Respondent statements from focus groups or in-depth interviews (unless otherwise stated)

1 Respondent drawings, and statements describing drawings, from focus groups

Dialogue between two respondents in focus groups



THE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

What does spirituality mean to us and what effect does it have on community and political engagement?



Although we know a great deal about the demographic characteristics of Americans who identify as spiritual, and many researchers have proposed detailed definitions of spirituality, we lack an understanding of the breadth and depth of what being spiritual means to people in the United States today.

There is a need to understand how people define spirituality in their own words, and the various components of what it means to be a spiritual person or live a spiritual life. There is also a need to better understand the relationship between spirituality and engagement in the public and political spheres. This is especially valuable to spiritual, religious, and civic leaders who are working to mobilize people toward public and political action.

This study seeks to build on existing spirituality research by reflecting how people understand spirituality and live spiritual lives in their own words, and exploring the relationship—and perceptions of the relationship—between spirituality and public engagement.

Survey Approaches to Measuring Spirituality

Many previous surveys have examined spirituality and measured it in a variety of ways. Some surveys look at how many people call themselves spiritual or religious, and how that is distributed in the population and subgroups of people.

These types of surveys allow researchers to draw conclusions such as: “The number of people in the U.S. who identify as ‘spiritual but not religious’ is on the rise,” or “People in the U.S. who identify as ‘spiritual but not religious’ tend to be politically liberal.” They capture trends over time and associations between these self-identifications and key demographics such as gender, education, race, or ethnicity. These studies rely on participants’ own definitions of spirituality.

Other surveys have measured spirituality by asking respondents about behaviors, attitudes, outlooks, and experiences that might correspond with spirituality. These can help researchers understand different aspects of spirituality and how spirituality relates to specific behaviors. The researchers’ unique definitions of spirituality influence the format and findings of these surveys.

Quantifying and Classifying Spirituality and Religiosity

Researchers often translate survey responses into classifications of spirituality and religiosity according to four groups: Spiritual and religious, spiritual but not religious, religious but not spiritual, and neither religious nor spiritual. They also each assess these groups differently. What follows are examples of major survey approaches that generate these classifications:

The **General Social Survey**, conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago, has used scales to measure the strength of spirituality and religiosity with the following questions:

“To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person: Very, Moderately, Slightly, or Not Religious?”

*“To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person: Very, Moderately, Slightly, or Not Spiritual?”*²

Pew Research Center, among its extensive religion research, has produced spirituality and religiosity groups by asking yes-or-no questions:

“Do you think of yourself as a religious person, or not?”

*“Do you think of yourself as a spiritual person, or not?”*³

Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) has measured respondent’s religiosity by their religious commitment and salience, and spirituality using a battery of questions to assess feelings of being connected to something larger than oneself. They use the following questions to measure respondents’ spirituality:

Some people say they have experiences of being personally moved, touched, or inspired often, while others say they do not have these experiences at all. In the past month, how often, if at all, did you experience any of the following:

- a. Felt particularly connected to the world around you?*
- b. Felt like you were a part of something much larger than yourself?*
- c. Felt a sense of larger meaning or purpose in life?*⁴

The unique approaches, phrasing, and response options used in various surveys lead to varying measures and conclusions about spirituality and religiosity. For example, Pew’s yes-or-no questions result in a measure of 48% of people who both say they are religious and spiritual, whereas PRRI finds 29% of people who are both more spiritual and more religious than average, according to their scales.

These differences are indicative of the profound nuances in the way people understand and experience spirituality. To learn more about these subtleties, this study asked about participants’ spiritual and religious self-identification using the General Social Survey’s four-point scales.

THE MANY WAYS WE ARE SPIRITUAL

*Understanding What Spirituality
Means to Americans*

“Everybody’s own spiritual knowledge is totally different depending on where you’ve lived, what you’ve been raised with, your life experiences. When it comes down to the nitty gritty, it’s hard to put into words.”

Chase, 36

Moderately spiritual / Moderately religious (Catholic)

VISUALIZING AND VERBALIZING SPIRITUALITY

How do people describe spirituality for themselves?



Seven in ten survey respondents said that spirituality is important in their lives. But what, exactly, are people thinking about when they answer questions about spirituality?

Through this study, we sought to understand how people talk about and experience spirituality in their lives and in their own words. In the 16 focus groups, the first question participants were asked was to draw what they thought of when they heard the word “spirituality.” In-depth interviews took a life history approach, in which participants shared meaningful or formative parts of their lives, and interviewers probed about religious or spiritual attitudes or experiences. In the survey, the first question was an open-ended response about what first comes to mind when pondering the word “spirituality.”

Participants’ written and visual descriptions revealed spirituality as a complex, diverse, and nuanced phenomenon. Drawings of what spirituality meant to people elicited a wide range of themes and ideas, from various physical places, experiences, practices, emotions, or people, to symbols such as hearts, arrows, or spirals. Written responses in the survey elicited a narrower set of themes ranging from faith, belief, or a relationship with a higher power; to religion or religious practices; to being in tune with oneself or the world; to practices such as prayer or meditation.

When asked to draw spirituality, people from different backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences expressed many shared ideas.

Focus group participants' drawings of the word "spirituality" revealed multiple dimensions of meaning behind the word, and their descriptions often invited nods of agreement from others. These drawings, and the descriptions participants gave, show how people understand spirituality through physical metaphors, abstractions, symbols, relationships, places, and practices. Common themes included:



EXPERT INSIGHT

Eliciting images of spirituality



Roman R. Williams, Ph.D.

Executive Officer

Society for the Scientific Study of Religion

When study participants were asked to draw a picture representing spirituality, researchers were using a social scientific research technique known as elicitation interviewing. This approach invites an interviewee to respond to a prompt with a photo or drawing. Next, these materials are used in a conversation that invites the interviewee to tell the story behind the image.

Consider the drawing created by Dale, a 69-year-old man from Des Moines who describes himself as not religious but slightly spiritual. His picture shows a stretch of grass from one side of the page to the other under a sky filled with clouds that look like cotton balls (see page 15). The content of the sketch connects his understanding of spirituality with the natural world like many other Americans. Behind his picture, there is a story to be discovered:

“When I was a boy . . . I laid down in a soft grassy meadow somewhere. I remember looking up at the sky and the clouds and it was warm. I always go back to this so-called happy place, but you could call it a spiritual place. I don’t know if I’ve ever been in a more peaceful feeling than I had at that moment. So, I just go back to it when I need it.”

The drawing elicited an important narrative about what spirituality means to Dale. It invokes feelings connected to a childhood memory and a specific location. His comments invite questions about when, why, where, how, and how often Dale goes back to this happy, spiritual place.

“
Drawings ... are answers to questions researchers may not have known to ask.”

It also invites broader inquiry into the relationship between spirituality and nature, spirituality as both a passive experience and an active seeking, and the benefits of spiritual practice in our lives.

Visual research techniques like these can expand what is possible to discover in interviews. Some researchers look to drawings or photos that emerge in elicitation interviews as answers to questions they may not have known to ask. As such, participants guide researchers down novel pathways of understanding. In the case of an inductive inquiry into spirituality like this one, these discoveries inform later stages of research, making for a robust methodology grounded in the everyday lives of participants.

1

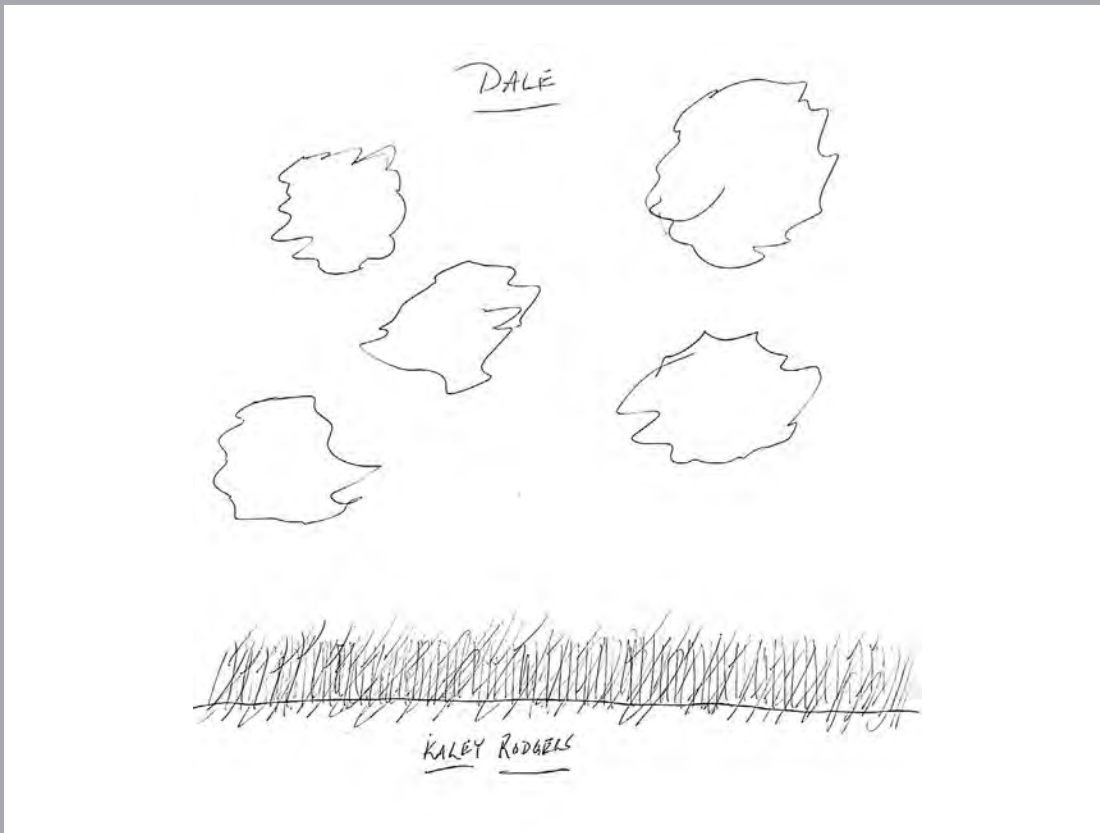
"I always go back to this so-called happy place, but you could call it a spiritual place."

Dale, 69

Slightly spiritual /

Not religious at all

1





Internal and external

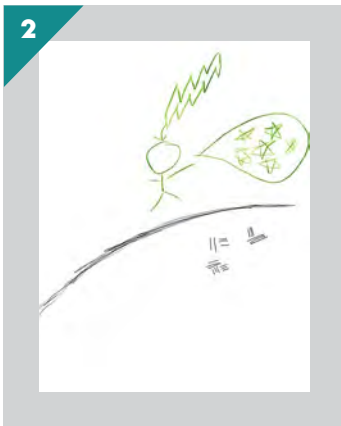
The relationship between people's inner selves and their outer experiences or actions



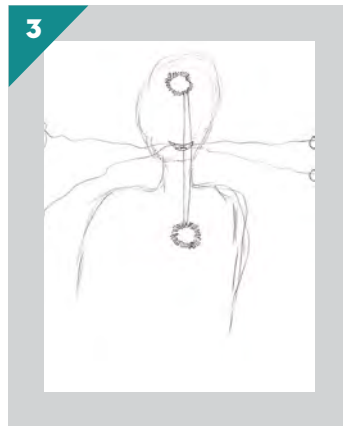
1

"Understanding what's out there, represented by the Milky Way, and what's in here, represented by not just the silhouette of the person, but the reflection, to reflect on something. The more you look outward, the more you understand inward."

Arieh, 40
Not spiritual at all /
Not religious at all



2



3

2

"It's a channel for energy and what you put out."

Mark, 52
Moderately spiritual /
Not religious at all

3

"What you think in your mind transfers to your heart and what you believe. It's your strength in your beliefs. And then I did the lines outward, like sharing your beliefs with others."

Jessica, 19
Moderately spiritual /
Moderately religious (Protestant)



Connection

To other people, the natural world, or a higher power



1
"Just connectedness ... to nature and everyone else."

Timothy, 21
 Not spiritual at all /
 Moderately religious (Evangelical)

2
"I thought of spirituality as something radiating from you and connecting to the natural world, or in relationships ... our connection to everything and everyone around us."

Kendra, 31
 Slightly spiritual /
 Not religious at all



3
"All different types of people, so Black, white, orange, yellow, blue, gay, straight, and doesn't really matter, but everyone's kind of together ... and reaching towards the same kind of moral being and feeling good about doing something. Trying to help out one another."

Shawn, 30
 Moderately spiritual / Moderately religious (Protestant)



The natural world

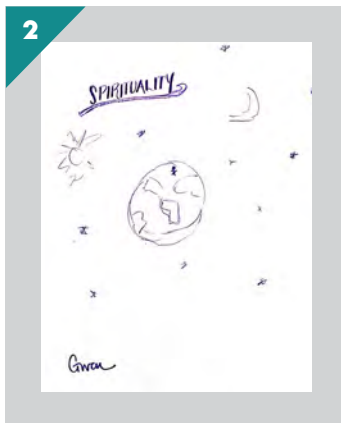
Being in or engaging with nature or the universe



1

"Fly fishing ... is my spiritual place. Fish, especially trout, live in beautiful places. [...] The only thing that you're hearing is sort of susurraton of the wind and whatever dry vegetation is around and the flowing of the river and the occasional rise of the fish."

Debra, 56
Moderately spiritual /
Not religious at all



2



3

2

"[It's] the way that I am connected to the universe and to other people and how all of those things are interconnected. Animals too, I only included a human but I think animals are involved in that whole circle of life."

Gwen, 29
Slightly spiritual /
Not at all religious

3

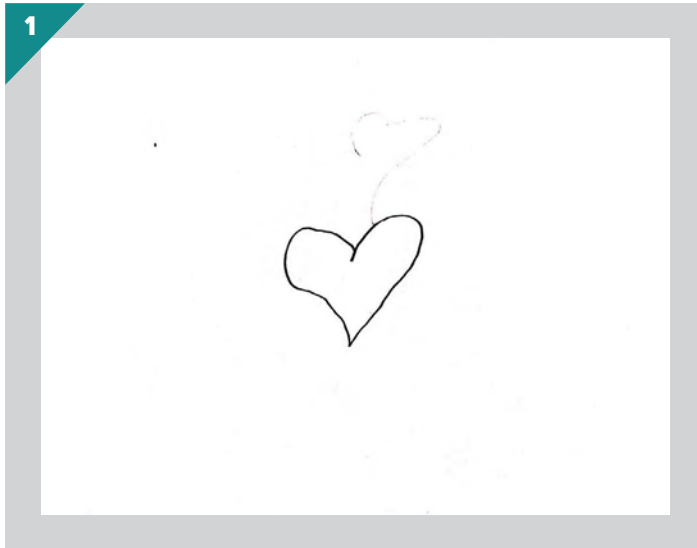
"I like to be by the ocean, the woods, or hiking and being ... [where] my higher power created."

James, 43
Very spiritual / Moderately religious
(Catholic)



Love

As a feeling, experience, or expression

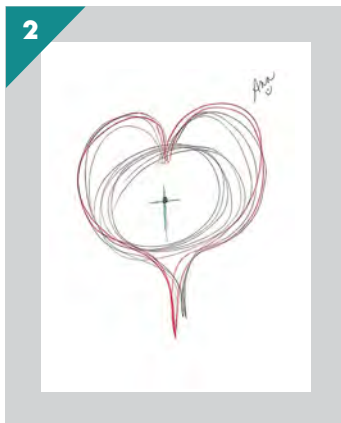


1

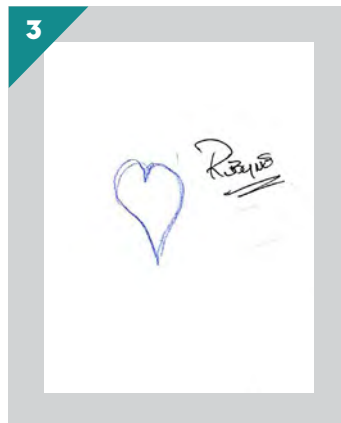
"Love. Love everyone as you love yourself."

Dante, 37

Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Christian)



2



3

2

"The circle represents my entire life and all the craziness that happens every day of the year. And then love is the center and the spirituality is what keeps you centered, and what keeps me keep a perspective on what's important."

Ann, 60

Moderately spiritual / Moderately religious (Episcopalian)

3

"I simply drew a heart, representative of love because however you arrive at this place, whether it's through religion or spirituality ... my ultimate goal is pure love."

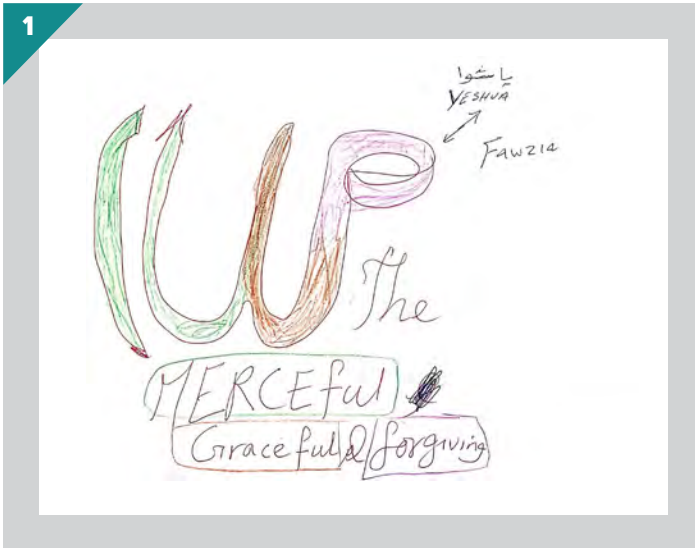
Robyn, 54

Very spiritual / Not at all religious



Divine being

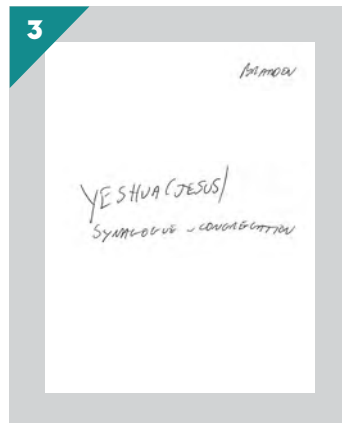
Belief in or relationship with a higher power of some kind



1

"Spirituality for me is Allah ... the green is God the merciful, and then brown is the graceful, the purple is God forgiving."

Fawzia, 62
Moderately spiritual /
Moderately religious (Muslim)



2

"To me, it's about connecting with source, and what I call source, God, and it's a desire to connect with that source at all times, through everyone."

Nancy, 54
Very spiritual / Moderately religious
(Episcopalian)

3

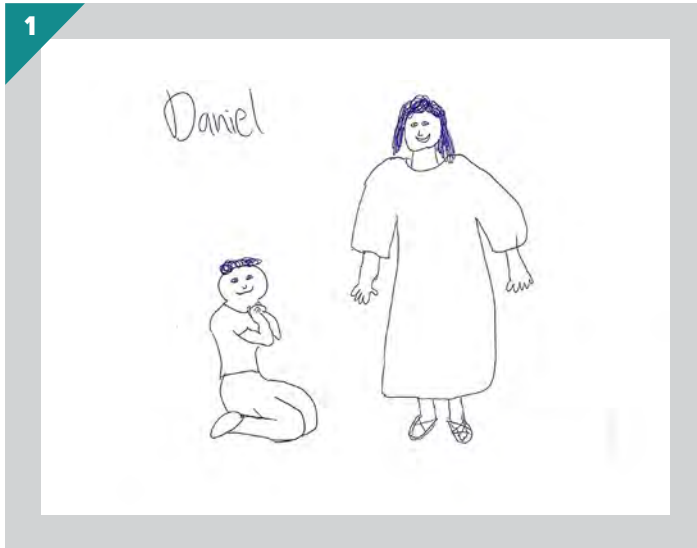
"With Jesus, there's love for us, our attempt to love him back, my synagogue and the congregation, the people in it, sharing prayer requests, praises, honoring God."

Brandon, 68
Very spiritual / Moderately religious
(Messianic Jewish)



Religion

Religious iconography or practices

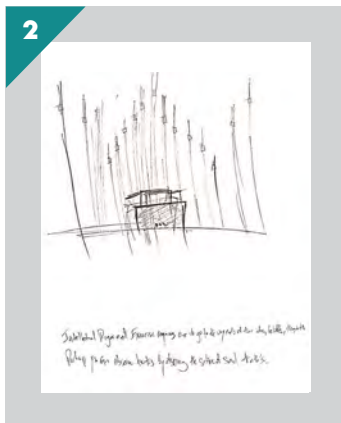


1
"Praying a lot, talking, having a connection with Him. This is me praying and this is Jesus."

Daniel, 20
 Very spiritual / Not at all religious

2
"I drew a picture of a church organ. [...] I think music is very deep in humans and very connected to spirituality and organs and church."

Jacob, 23
 Moderately religious / Moderately spiritual (Protestant Christian)



3
"So, if you are spiritual, I feel like you would study your religion. You would be pretty devout to it, at least enough to read up on it and be aware of what's written in the book that you're supposedly following. Most religions have a church or some building they congregated at."

Ryan, 26-35
 Not spiritual at all / Slightly religious (Christian: non-denominational)



Peace

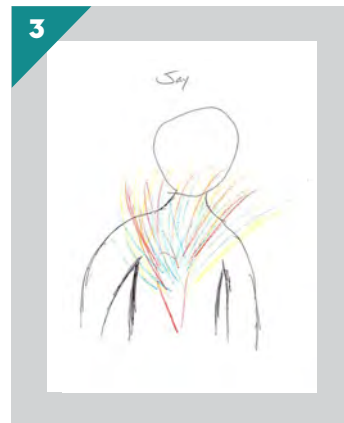
As a feeling or experience



1

"I think that spirituality is finding something that makes you happy and makes you feel at peace. So when I think about yoga or meditating, I think it's like you know, finding that spot where you feel calm."

Anna, 48
Not spiritual at all /
Not religious at all



2

"I'm just kind of looking up hopefully with sort of a contemplative look on my face. [It's] being more self-aware and able to reflect on things that are meaningful to me."

Roberta, 64
Not spiritual at all /
Slightly religious (Jewish)

3

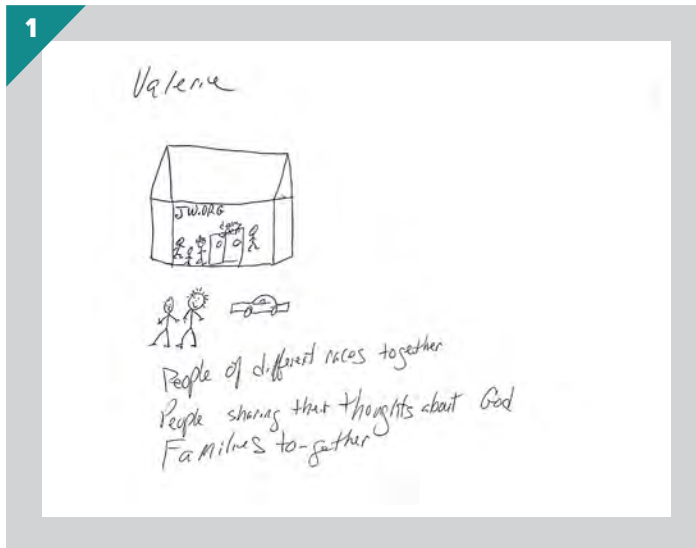
"It just feels good, it feels bright, it feels one and so ... these colors are ... all kind of coming together. When you get that feeling of peace or something greater than yourself, you get that aura around you, a sort of peace."

Jay, 27
Moderately spiritual /
Moderately religious
(Christian: non-denominational)



Relationships with people

Connections with family, friends, and strangers

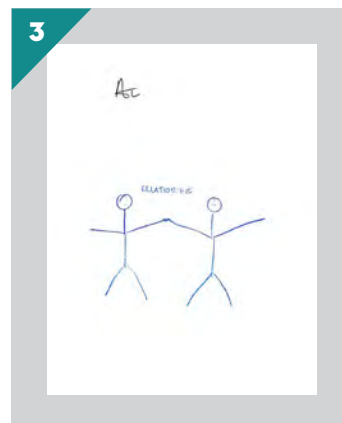
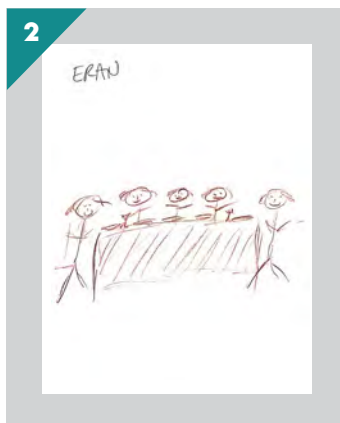


1

"A group of people, of all different races and nationalities, all over the world, worshiping almighty God, and being together ... families that worship together, cry together, pray together ... anywhere you go in the world, you can be welcomed and treated like family."

Valerie, 59

Moderately spiritual / Very religious
(Jehovah's Witness)



2

"I ended up drawing a family, because if I'm forced into somehow thinking about spirituality, that's where it would come down to ... relationships, love, what people mean to each other."

Eran, 57

Not spiritual at all /
Not religious at all

3

"It's about relationships, it's not only your relationship with whom you would say your higher power is, but also your relationship with people you encounter on a daily basis."

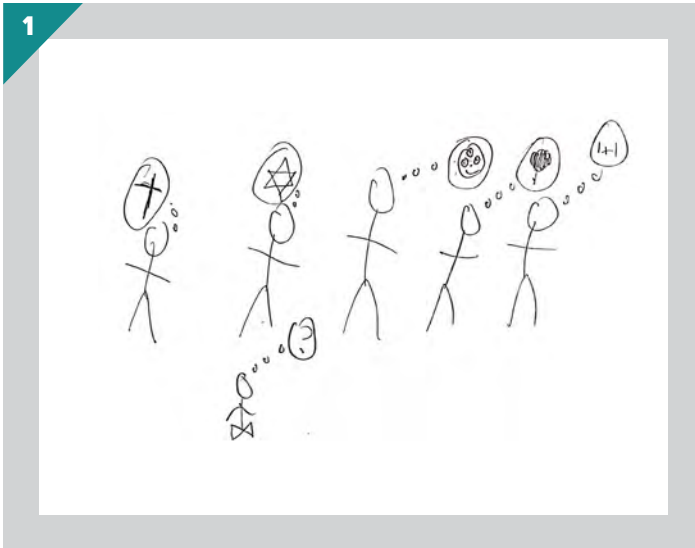
AI, 54

Very spiritual / Very religious
(Catholic)



Seeking

A search for answers or attempt to make sense of the world



1
"It's a bunch of different people. Some are following Christianity, Judaism. ... I drew a tree, because some people believe in Gaia, I drew 1+1 because some people are more logical. Then I drew somebody cross-legged with a question mark, because they're all trying to explain things that they don't know how to explain."

Gus, 29
Not spiritual at all /
Not religious at all



2
"I [drew] a road. I'm going off into the distance, I guess? To me spirituality is kind of finding meaning, or finding purpose, or whatever. So if you're on a road, you're searching, finding. And it's not necessarily a destination."

John, 26-35
Slightly spiritual /
Not religious at all

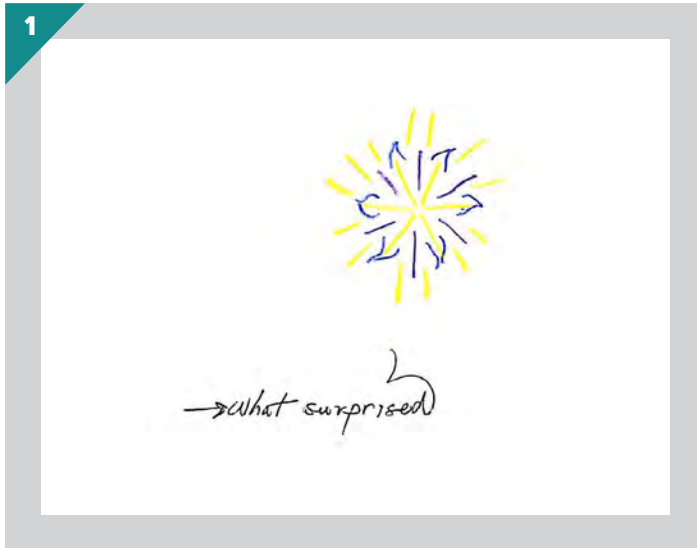
3
"[If] I have something that I'm worried about or if I need help I can turn toward this higher power, whether it be in a person or in a physical thing."

Anna, 18
Very spiritual / Slightly religious
(Catholic)



Energy

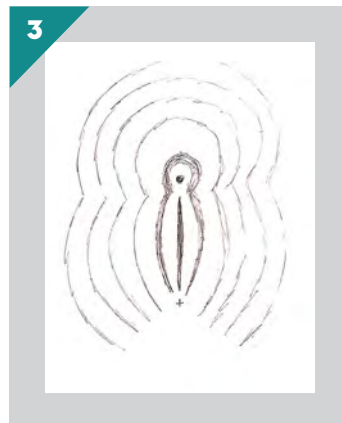
A force emanating from within or outside a person



1

"To me there's a certain kind of emanation, radiance, [of] which I guess the sun is representative ... We're all a light of some sort in our own worlds."

Dennis, 71
Very spiritual / Not religious at all



2

"Nebulous clouds that are representing the kind of energy that's inside these people. They all intersect in some places because I feel like there's an energy flowing all around us and through us. [...] It's sort of like the concept on Star Wars—the Force."

Jim, 60
Moderately spiritual /
Not religious at all

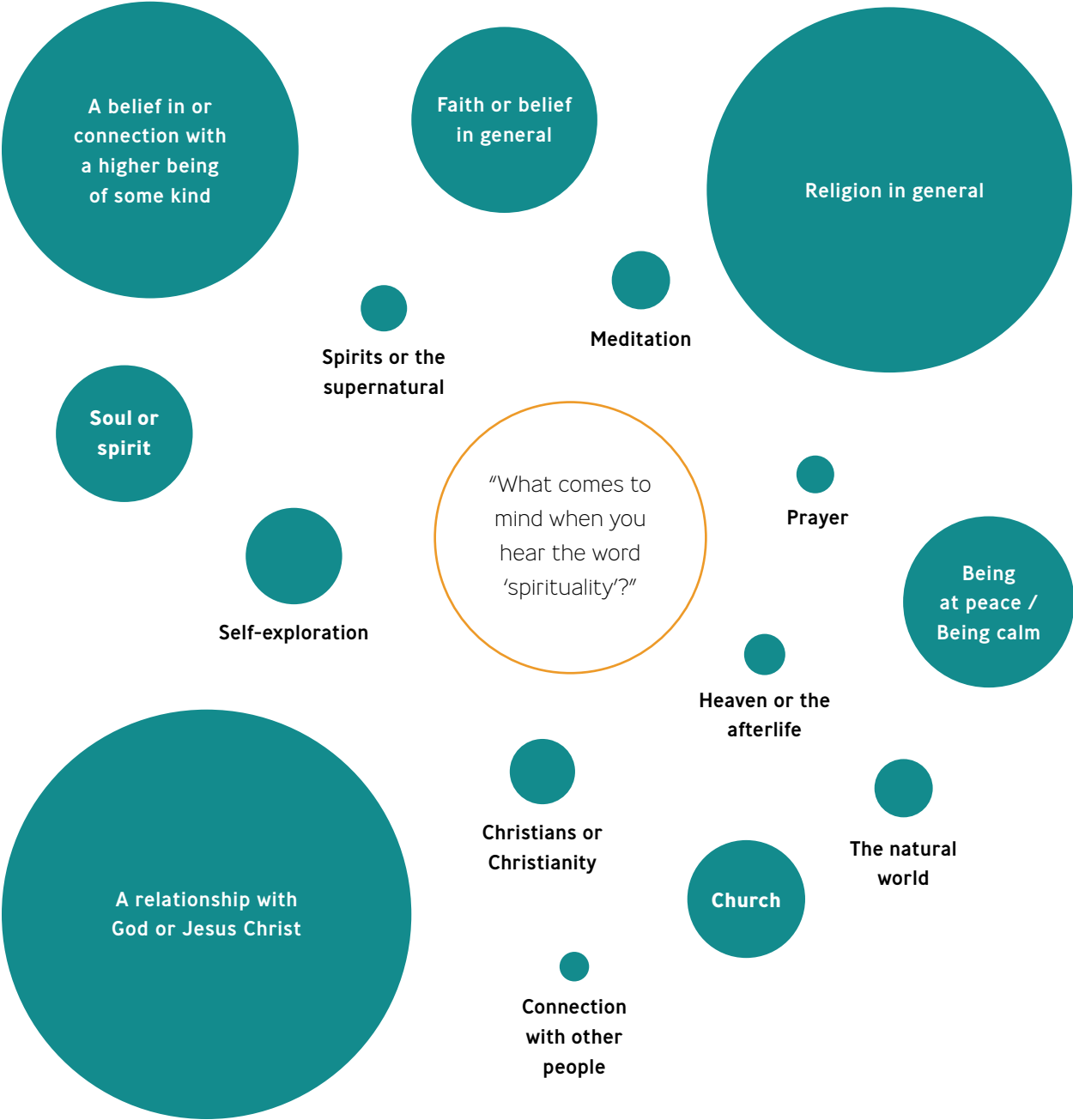
3

"It's a symbol that I've used in my artistic expression and I feel like spirituality is connecting to the cosmic good and I find art brings me to that place ... we all are connected and there is this positive energy that we all share and trying to find and ride that wave."

Golda, 35
Moderately spiritual /
Slightly religious (Methodist)

Written top-of-mind thoughts about spirituality tended to reflect a more tradition-centric view of spirituality than drawings.

When asked to share top-of-mind thoughts about spirituality in the survey, respondents commonly included reference to religion in general, belief in a higher power, or descriptions of a relationship with God or Jesus. In contrast to focus group drawings, written survey responses were more likely to include comparisons or contrasts with religion.



Sample responses to the open-ended survey question are below.

These categories were identified by systematically hand-coding the written responses. Frequency reflects how many of the 3,609 survey respondents referenced that theme. A single response could be coded to multiple themes.⁵

"What comes to mind when you hear the word 'spirituality'?"

A relationship with God or Jesus Christ

Frequency: 994

"My personal connection to God, or Heavenly Father. It's a word I would use to describe my own understanding of my Divine Nature as a human."

"An interest in finding out more about God. Pursuing a relationship with one's creator."

"A relationship with God without religion, more about being filled with the Holy Spirit."

Religion in general

Frequency: 958

"Normally organized religion, or someone's interpretation of what they are substituting for organized religion."

"Spirituality is believing in a higher being and having some thoughts regarding religion but not necessarily being religious or believing [in a] specific deity."

"The possibility of a higher power and afterlife [and] living a life based on the tenets of some organized religion."

A belief in or connection with a higher being of some kind

Frequency: 722

"Belief in something greater than ourselves, and the ability to try to understand it."

"A deep connection to some higher power, however that's conceived, with or without participation in organized religion."

"A sense of god that gives rise to thoughts of somehow being part of an intangible universe that includes love and respect, gratitude and humility."

Faith or belief in general

Frequency: 366

"Spirituality is my relationship with my beliefs of faith, defined as the believing in the things that are seen and unseen."


"Having faith. Believing in something. Not necessarily being religious, but having faith guide your [principles] and morals."

Being at peace / Being calm

Frequency: 361

"The state of inner peace and commitment to aspects beyond the material world. A sense of inner well-being and a propensity to do good."

"Being at peace with the universe. Having a stability in your life that lets you have an open channel to talk to the universe."



Soul or spirit

Frequency: 262

"Being in touch with what is good for the soul. Seeing things as God sees them [and] to focus on what is unseen—the heart, your spirit, and souls."

"To be in tune with the spirit. To grow the bond between the mind and spirit."



Church

Frequency: 247

"Living for Jesus, attending church, and singing hymns."

"Church ... the practice of religion and things that you do that are deeper than surface level."




Self-exploration

Frequency: 189

"A personal journey in pursuit of a right relationship with and between self, community, nature/environment, and something beyond oneself (God, a higher power, etc.)."

"Questioning one's self and life, trying to find resolve within yourself by finding the truth of existence."



Christians or Christianity

Frequency: 87

"[A] fallen away mainline Christian. An individual who prefers not to belong to an organized religious group, but has some feelings of connection with the belief of a higher power."



Meditation

Frequency: 71


"Meditation [and] a desire to connect with universal forces and energies."



The natural world

Frequency: 71


"I think of the connectedness of nature, being a part of a bigger thing. Being quiet and listening to life."



Spirits or the supernatural

Frequency: 64

"Spirits. Signs from loved ones who passed away."



Heaven or the afterlife

Frequency: 53

"Personal beliefs about creation and death. What type of afterlife if any exists? What is our role in our existence?"



Prayer

Frequency: 49

"Praying in a quiet place. Feeling uplifted."



Connection with other people

Frequency: 26

"Being in tune with nature, surroundings, and other people."

SPIRITUAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION

To what extent do people consider themselves spiritual, both within and beyond religious traditions?



In our survey, more than eight in ten people identified as spiritual to some extent, three in four considered themselves religious to some extent, and seven in ten people answered affirmatively to both.

But people’s descriptions of what it means to call themselves “spiritual” revealed nuances about and limitations to defining spirituality solely by self-identification. To ask whether someone considers themselves a spiritual person is to ask about their interpretive experience, rather than a measure of what spirituality is. It is also a reflection of a cultural moment in time: asking about spirituality amidst the counterculture movements of the 1960s, for example, would elicit different responses than today.

So, we wanted to understand—how do people interpret what it means to call oneself spiritual?

Our survey suggests that most people identify as at least slightly spiritual and religious—but we also saw from people’s qualitative responses that the extent to which they self-identify as “spiritual” and “religious” is closely tied to their personal associations or connotations regarding the words “spiritual” or “religious” themselves. People explained how different factors—from family history to recent spiritual activity to context—influenced how they answered the spirituality and religiosity survey questions. This led to unexpected differences between people who fall into the same spiritual-religious category.

For example, Daniel, 20, who identified as very spiritual and not religious at all, drew and described in a focus group his relationship with God (*see below*).

In contrast, Kat, 29, who identified as moderately spiritual and not religious at all when she was recruited several weeks before the interview, said during the conversation that she doesn't describe herself as spiritual "at all." When asked to describe why she might have answered "moderately spiritual" in the screening survey, she said:

"My mood changes throughout the week. If I'd gone to meditation the night before—I like my [Shambhala] Center—I'd have felt a little connected to them. I said moderately spiritual? I don't know."

1

"I talk to God a lot. ...That just means praying a lot, talking, having a connection with Him."

Daniel, 20

Very spiritual / Not religious at all

1

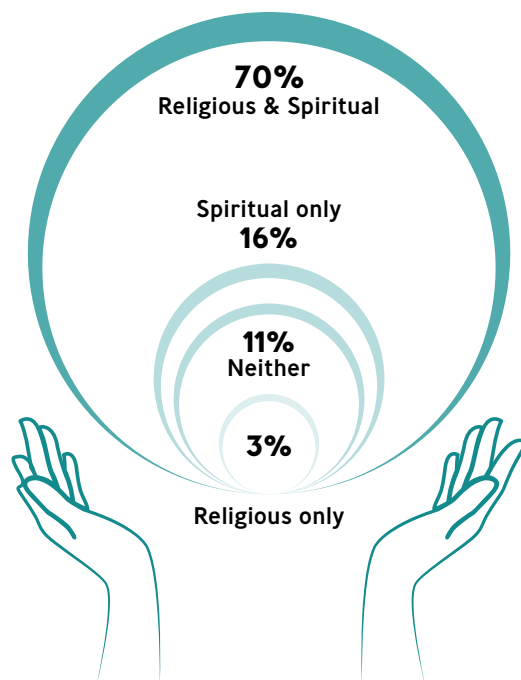


TO WHAT EXTENT DO PEOPLE CONSIDER THEMSELVES SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS?

In this study, we asked two separate survey questions to explore spiritual and religious identity and intensity: “To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?” and “To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?”⁶

These two questions offer several layers of insight into whether—and to what extent—respondents identify as spiritual, and as religious. They show if, and to what extent, people identify as spiritual. They show if, and to what extent, people identify as religious. And, they allow us to organize people into four groups: Those who identify as both spiritual and religious; spiritual but not religious; religious but not spiritual; and neither religious nor spiritual. For the purposes of this study, we chose to use a low threshold for inclusion in these groups: Those who consider themselves at least slightly spiritual are considered spiritual, and those who say at least slightly religious are considered religious.

A vast majority of people consider themselves both spiritual and religious.

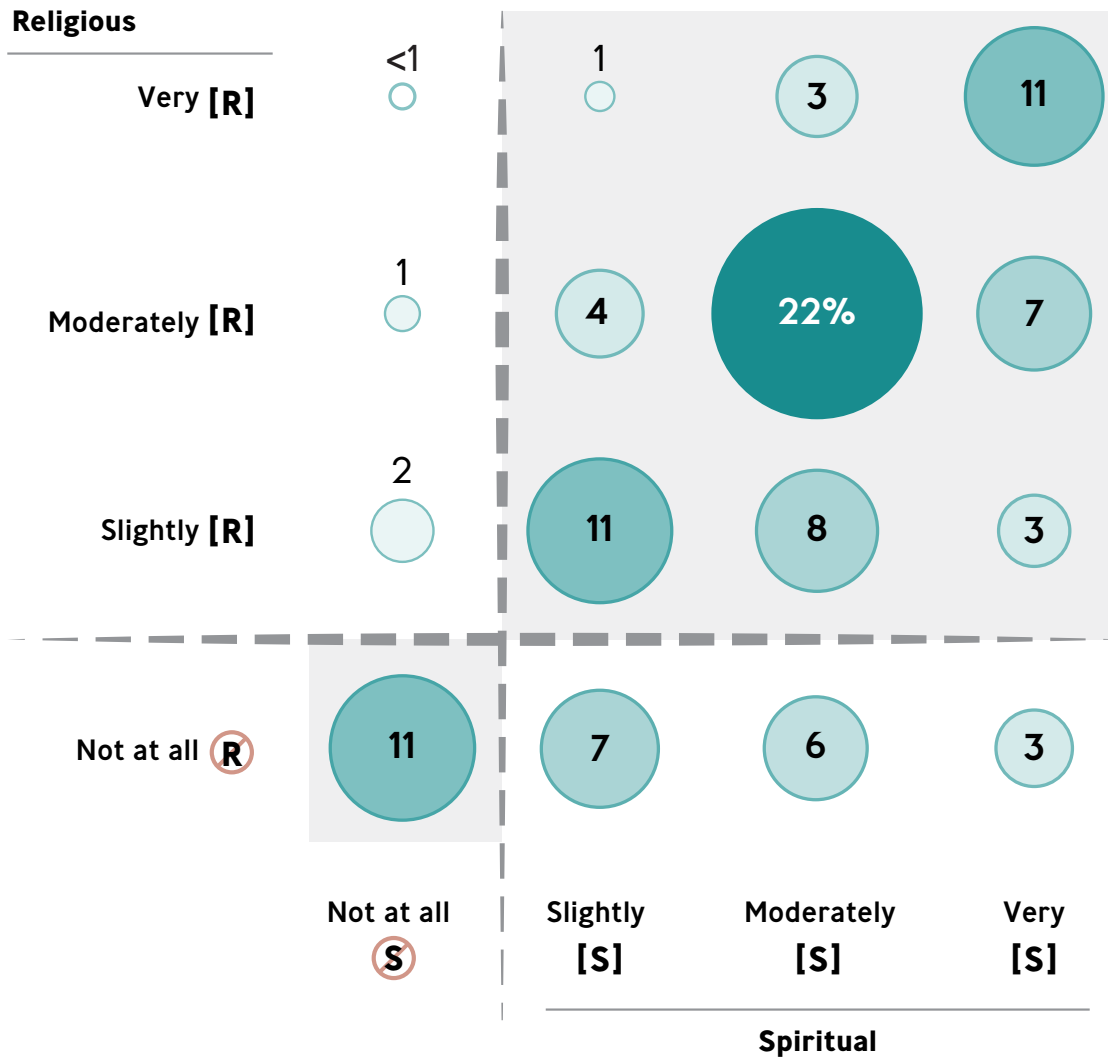


Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Nearly

9 in 10

people consider themselves either spiritual or religious.



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

86%

identify as spiritual to some extent.

73%

consider themselves religious to some extent.

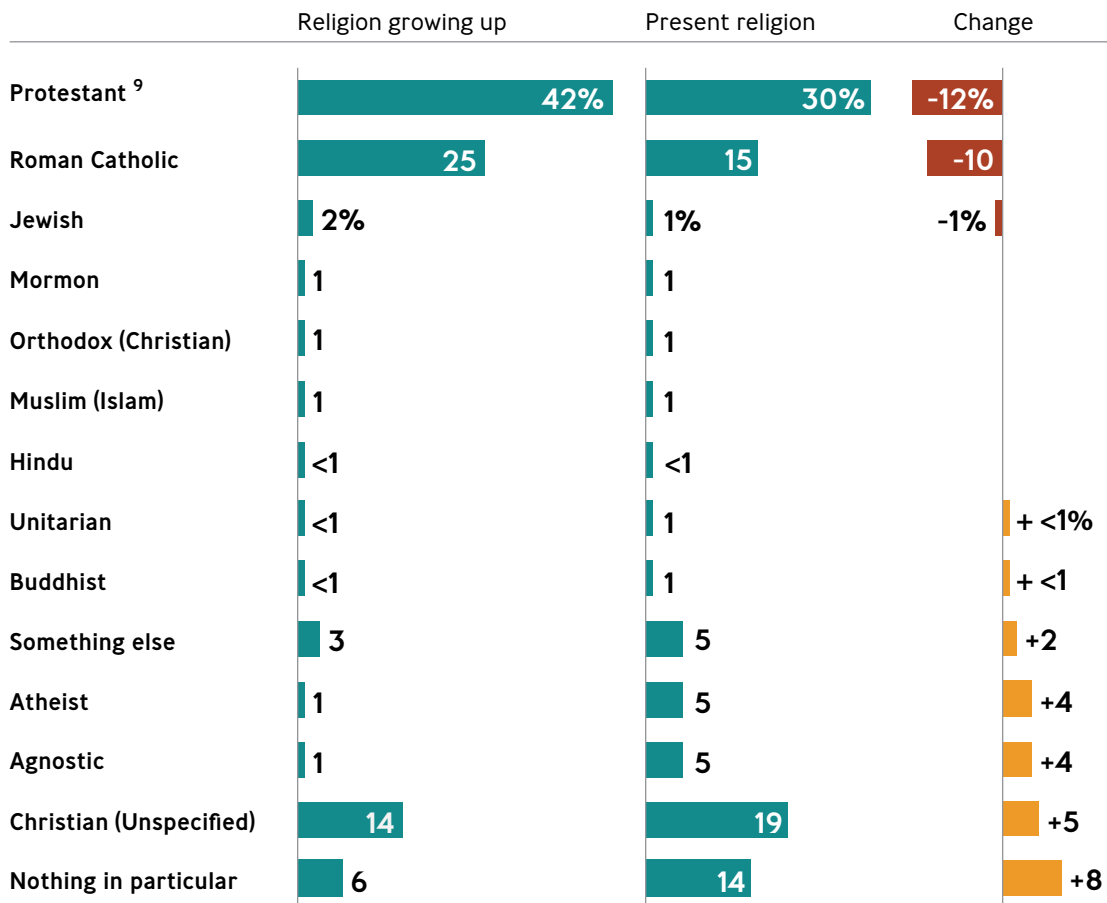
97%

who say they are religious also consider themselves spiritual.

Association with religious groups is declining over the course of people’s lives.

Mirroring the population-level decline of religious affiliation that Pew Research Center and others have tracked over decades, nearly one in four people (22%) who identified as Catholic or Protestant growing up, no longer describe themselves as affiliated with those religions. ⁷

“When you were growing up, what was your religion, if any? What is your present religion, if any?” ⁸



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

“ I grew up in the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church, and as a young man, went to church every week ... I was on the fast track to be a Lutheran minister. [...] But my wife and I finally came to the realization that if we talked with each other honestly, we never really did believe. We just tried really hard not to disappoint our families.”

John, 61

Slightly spiritual / Not religious at all

EXPERT INSIGHT

Spiritual but not religious: A label defined by what it isn't



Rev. Sue Phillips

Co-Founder, [Sacred Design Lab](#)

“Spiritual but not religious” is often unhelpful as a data category because it forces a distinction that many people can't easily make. It's hard to define the dividing line in terms of beliefs or behaviors between that which is “spiritual” and that which is “religious.”

At the same time, the range of reasons why people might define themselves this way is incredibly broad. For some, it's a rational rejection of core doctrine from their religion of origin. For others, it's a refusal to step automatically into the faith of their grandparents. For still others, it's not wanting to adopt a particular religion as part of their identity.

When we use the word “religion” we conjure institutions—denominations, doctrines, hierarchies, creeds, affiliation, and membership. It's often the collection of institutional intermediaries that people are distancing themselves from when they say they are “not religious.”

When it comes to questions of belief, it's almost always easier for people to say what they don't believe than it is to describe what they do. And yet throughout this study we see respondents of all affiliations describing themselves as spiritual, and a breadth of behaviors that demonstrate that spirituality. That's why “spiritual” is such a fertile category: it allows people to claim the longing and connection they feel to something bigger than themselves without a firm definition.

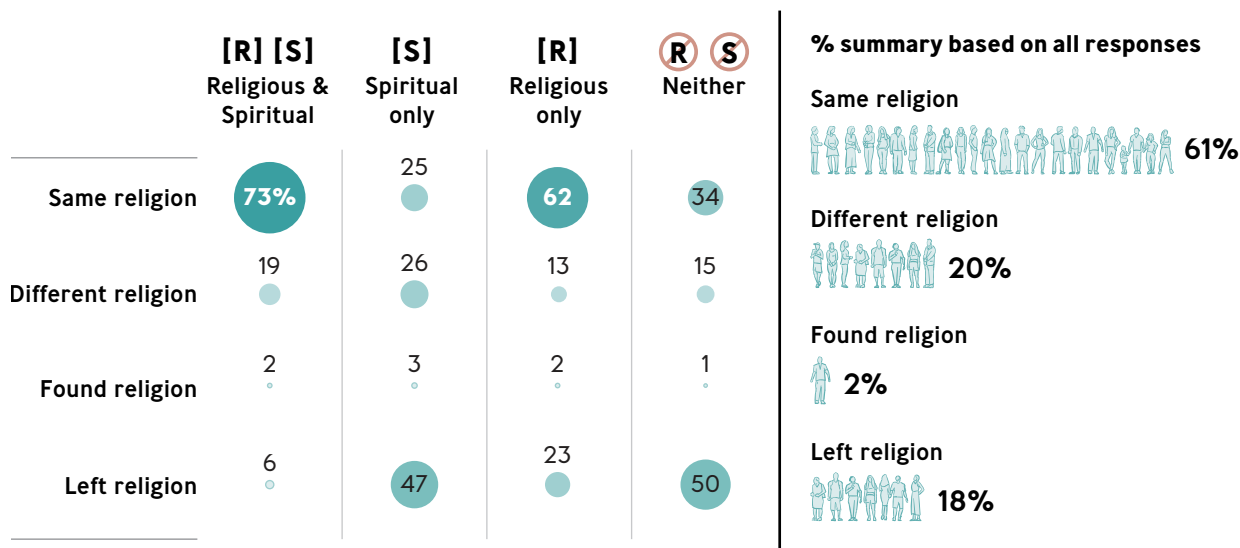
“

It's almost always easier for people to say what they don't believe than it is to describe what they do.”

Half of those who identify as spiritual but not religious—or neither spiritual nor religious—grew up in a religion, but left religion.

Focus group and survey participants described the complexities, nuances, or limitations of labeling themselves according to religious or spiritual identities.

Religious Consistency



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Religious consistency was determined by comparing how respondents identified their religion growing up with their religion today. (1) Same religion: If respondent answered “present religion” and “religion growing up” as same religion. (2) Different religion: If respondent answered “present religion” and “religion growing up” as different religion. (3) Found religion: If respondent answered “present religion” as any religion, and “religion growing up” as Atheist, Agnostic, or Nothing in particular. (4) Left religion: If respondent answered “present religion” as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular, and “religion growing up” as any religion.

“Publicly, I would say I am Catholic for the purposes of my family and friends and based on my participation in those communities, but the participation is social and for ‘tradition’ reasons related to the communities I belong to; it is not for ‘religious’ purposes.”

[Survey respondent, name unknown], 48
Slightly spiritual / Not religious at all¹⁰

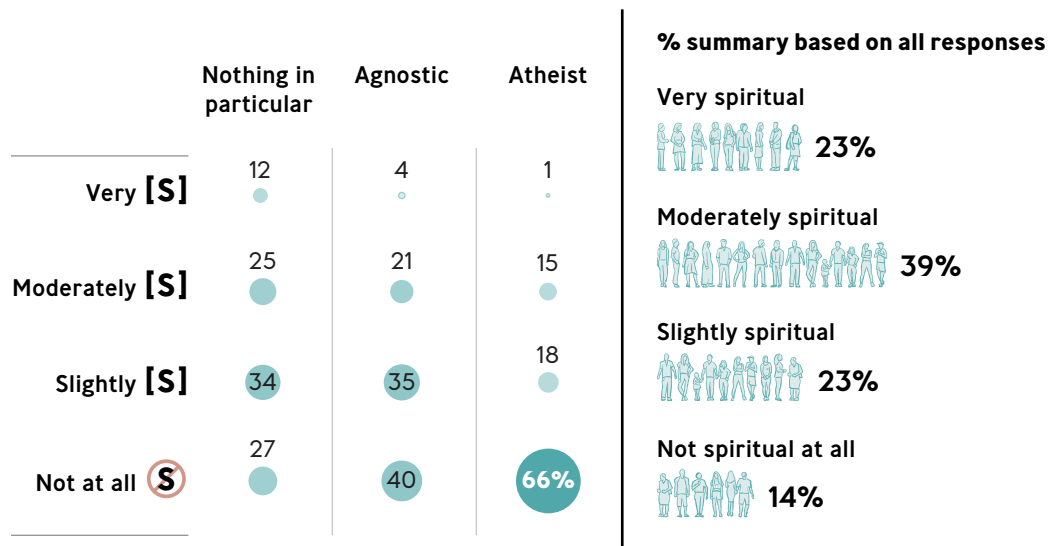
“I don’t subscribe to anything spiritual or otherwise. I don’t need to. I might have an experience that feels spiritual, I might feel really connected to something, but it doesn’t mean that I have to refer to myself as a spiritual being.”

Rachael, 44
Not spiritual at all / Not religious at all

Many people who don't identify with any religion today still consider themselves spiritual to some extent.

Participants who described themselves as not at all religious did not necessarily label themselves agnostic, atheist, or "nothing in particular." Neither did they all disaffiliate from religion: Some focus group and interview participants who said they were not religious still named a religious denomination.

"To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?"



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

“ I would say [my husband and I are] both agnostic I guess, for lack of a better word. We're not quite sure that all of this is what it is.”

Sarah, 34
Slightly spiritual / Not religious at all (Agnostic)

“ My faith is everything to me, but no, I no longer practice Catholicism.”

Michelle, 51
Moderately spiritual / Not religious at all (Catholic)

Respondents overwhelmingly described spiritual people in positive terms.

Focus group participants described spiritual people as having positive attitudes, such as being happy and joyful; having positive characteristics, such as being humble, calm, and centered; and relating to others in positive ways, such as being compassionate, generous, or caring. Negative descriptions were uncommon, but included using descriptors such as wishy-washy, “woo-woo,” delusional, or superstitious.



2

“Everybody’s happy, beautiful flowers—you feel that peace [and can] go and share that peace that you have.”

Rosa, 45
Very spiritual / Very religious
(Pentecostal)

“Because of [my friend] Karen’s spirituality, she will not go out into the world to do intentional harm. She won’t go into a road rage. That’s not who she is. A lot of that is her spirituality. Who she’s made herself to be from her spirituality. She’s kindness, she’s self-loving.”

Robyn, 53
Moderately spiritual / Not religious at all

“I can’t just see somebody and say they’re spiritual or religious. I have to talk to them. We have to have some kind of communication for me to say, ‘Okay, you’re positive. Hate is not spewing out of your mouth.’”

Shannon, 50
Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Christian: Non-denominational)

Several respondents who identified as not spiritual described how the natural world gave them a sense of spirituality.

They described how they saw spirituality in the way natural systems work, in the way energy flows without being created or destroyed, or in the wonder of natural beauty. Some who identified as neither spiritual nor religious cited science as why they were not religious, or described feeling uncertain about whether science is the only way to make sense of what we cannot see.



3

"I strongly believe in science. So I believe everything can be created but nothing can be destroyed; it transforms. So I believe when people die, there's some sort of energy source, you know, that transforms into other dimensions that we can't see. That's how I feel about spirituality."

Swam Htet, 25
Not spiritual at all /
Not religious at all

“

Being at any river is what I feel is my church. That's when I feel like I'm connecting, spiritually. That's when I feel calm, relaxed. The Pacific Northwest is beautiful. When I'm out in that, especially [with] my feet in the river, that's when I say, 'Wow, this is so beautiful.' That's when I start to think, 'is there a higher being that created all of this, or is it all science-based?' I don't know. That's where I struggle."

Brandon, 37
Not spiritual at all / Not religious at all (Agnostic)

Over the course of two-hour focus group conversations, some shifted the amount to which they identified as spiritual.

Those who answered that they were more spiritual than when they originally responded during focus group recruiting interviews explained how they began to see themselves in the ways fellow focus group participants described spirituality, described a spiritual person, or connected spirituality with actions.

“Originally I would consider myself not spiritual, at least in terms of religion. However, after discussion, I would say that I am at least moderately spiritual in terms of living my life with certain values. I believe in being a good person and I think I try to live my life in a way that supports that.”

Ryan, 26-35

Not spiritual at all / Slightly religious (Christian: non-denominational)

“I'm not sure if I thought I did [have spirituality]. So it's good that this [conversation] has given me some sense that I do have some spirituality. It reminds me of what puts me at peace.”

Bret, 59

Not spiritual at all / Not religious at all

EXPERT INSIGHT

It matters who you're talking to



Nancy T. Ammerman, Ph.D.

*Professor of Sociology of Religion, Emerita
Boston University*

One of the most striking findings of this study is what happened in the focus groups: People who came in with one view of themselves, their spirituality, and its effects on their lives often came to different conclusions by the end of the discussion. When it comes to what we think spirituality is and how it works, it matters who you are talking to.

While spirituality is an increasingly widespread topic in U.S. culture, it doesn't have an officially designated definition, and there are few if any organized locations where people talk together about what it means—except, of course, organized religious groups. There simply aren't widespread agreed-upon understandings, even if there are recognizable underlying patterns. That's how language works, and that's how self-identity works. It matters who you are talking to.

This study joins several broad-based studies from the U.S. and Europe that have documented the range of connotations of the term “spirituality,” and there is a remarkable degree of overlap among them. These results, then, reinforce the range of meanings spirituality has acquired—from a relationship with Jesus to a feeling of awe in the universe. It also reinforces the high degree of overlap between the identities, beliefs, and practices of religious people with those of people who consider themselves spiritual. For most people, being spiritual and being religious go together. That overlap, however, is much wider in the U.S. than in Europe. In Europe, it is much more common for spirituality to be defined in individual, self-oriented, non-religious ways. Here, people's spiritual beliefs and practices are strongly shaped by their religious communities. It matters where you ask the question.

“
*There simply aren't
widespread agreed-
upon understandings,
even if there
are recognizable
underlying patterns
[to spirituality].”*

That means that the results of this fascinating study lead us to ask more questions—where are these spiritual ideas coming from and how are they sustained? My own research led me to the conclusion that a spiritual outlook on life requires a circle of ongoing conversation in which that outlook is nurtured. Perhaps attending religious services, but even more importantly, participating in a group or activity that encourages a spiritual perspective. It matters who you're talking to.

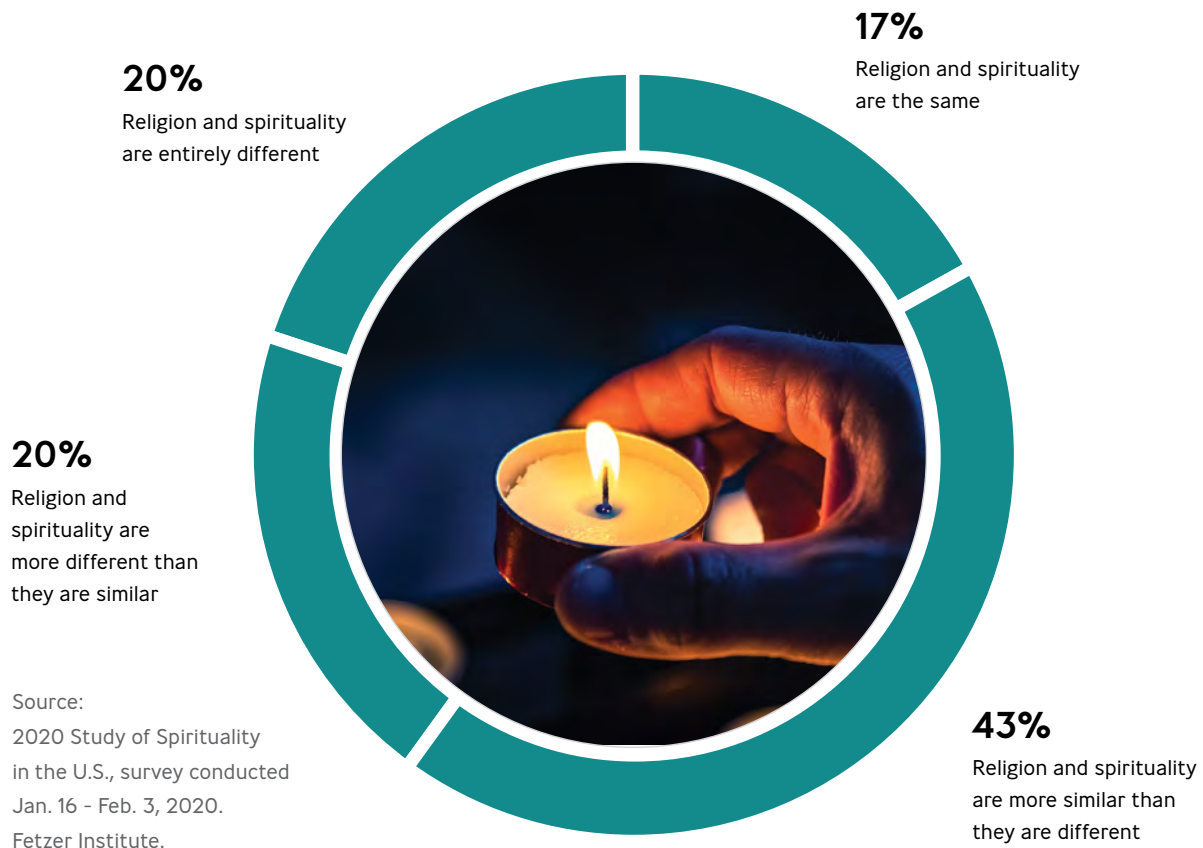


HOW DO PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION?

People in nearly every interview and focus group brought up religion when discussing spirituality. Many focus group and interview participants defined spirituality by comparing or contrasting it with religion. Others talked about spirituality as the lived experience of their religion—or vice versa.

3 in 5 people think that religion and spirituality are either the same or more similar than they are different.

“Which statement best describes how you think about spirituality and religion?”





Survey respondents who said that *religion and spirituality are the same* most commonly described the similarity in terms of belief or faith. ¹¹

Some described how spirituality is a manifestation of religion, while others described how religion is a manifestation of spirituality.

“

Religion is communal spirituality. Spirituality is individualized religion. They are both ways of communicating with God, either together with other people, through ritualized gestures, readings, and prayers (religion) or how you hear God speaking directly to you (spirituality).”

“

Spirituality is the byproduct of religion. It’s linked. It’s a feeling of the beliefs you have in a given religion. It’s like fire to smoke. One produces the other.”



Survey respondents who said that *spirituality and religion are more similar than they are different* most commonly described how the two complement, support, or enhance each other.

They described a belief in or connection to something greater—whether to a higher power, a divine being, other people, the world, or the broader universe. They spoke to similar values systems that arise from both.

“

I believe that my spirituality is expressed in my belief system, which is enhanced by my religion. My religion has built the foundation for the expression of my spirituality. Spirituality is more personal than religion, but religion provides the structure outside the body to help your spirituality grow.”

“

I believe religion is what method you believe in God or Buddha or whoever. I think spirituality is more how you bring religion to your life and use God or Buddha or whoever as a higher figure to lead you to do good things.”



Survey respondents who said that *religion and spirituality are more different than they are similar* most commonly explained that religion offers a shared system for belief or practice.

They described spirituality as more personal—a positive attribute for some, and a negative one for others.

“

Spirituality is different [from] religion in that it is more self-centered in my opinion. Religion is more of a faith in God and adherence to the teachings of the Bible.”

“

Religion is more like a strict parent with a list of [ideas or rules] that are pushed into your head to follow or else; spirituality is more so like the parent who gives you the information and trusts that you will abide by what’s right and wrong.”



Survey respondents who said that *religion and spirituality are entirely different* were most likely to describe religion as a human-made, established, or prescribed system.

They described spirituality as an evolving personal feeling or experience. Some people noted how the two are incompatible; others noted how they are simply different.

“

Religion has a very set-in-stone rule set. Spirituality can vary by person, by experience, by what’s needed for that individual, and is always free and open to change and evolution.”

“

Religion is based on man’s understanding of things written long ago. Spirituality is based on a feeling that you have, not what someone says to you, but what you experience through your senses.”

BELIEF

*What do people believe about a higher power—
whatever they name it?*



In focus groups and interviews, participants used many names for a “something more” that was intrinsic to their spirituality: Terms ranged from “God,” to “Allah,” to “divine Goddess” or “life force.”

When focus group participants labeled this, many also mentioned how the name they used might not be the same as others in the room.

We wanted people to define the divine for themselves in the survey as much as possible. The survey question attempted to reflect the language people used, using a similarly inclusive name for that entity. The phrase finally settled on was: “a higher power—whether it be God, gods, or some other divine source or universal energy.”¹²

We found that, while a majority believe in this higher entity without a doubt, this belief did not directly correspond with spirituality or religiosity.

That is, not all people who identify as religious or spiritual say they definitely believe in such a being or power—and not all people who believe in such a being or power are religious or spiritual. And some people who expressed doubt or disbelief that a higher power exists still described having experiences relating to such a being or entity.

Throughout the report, we try to alternate words for the divine, since participants were invited to substitute their particular wording in the survey. Some people, for example, react against the word “God,” but some find that word central to their faith. Some find that “higher power” does not speak to the kind of present, loving, and all-knowing being that they envision. For many, thinking of the divine as “universal energy” is perfect; for others it is not adequately personal. The focus group and interview quotations and drawings provide necessary breadth and nuance that go beyond the limitations of survey language.

3 in 4 people believe in a higher power. More than half have no doubts.

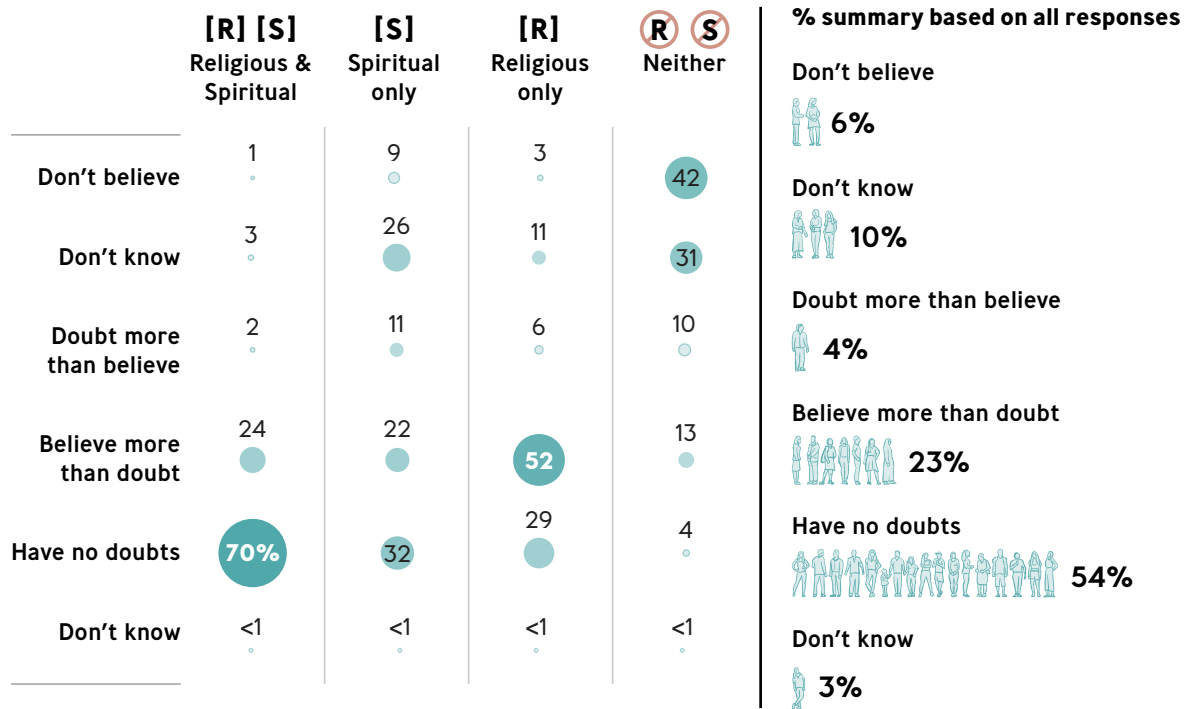
“Which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about a higher power—whether it be God, gods, or some other divine source or universal energy?”¹³



Source:
2020 Study of Spirituality
in the U.S., survey conducted
Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020.
Fetzer Institute.

A significant majority of both spiritual and religious people say they have no doubts that a higher power exists.

“Which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about a higher power—whether it be God, gods, or some other divine source or universal energy?”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Response options to the question were as follows: (1) I don't believe in a higher power; (2) I don't know whether there is a higher power, and I don't believe there is any way to find out; (3) I doubt a higher power's existence more than I believe; (4) I believe in a higher power's existence more than I doubt; (5) I know a higher power exists and I have no doubts about it; (6) Don't know.

“Because I believe that Jesus is that God [who loves us], spirituality looks like knowing Him.”

Elizabeth, 44
Very spiritual / Very religious (Protestant)

“I don't know if I believe in God. I definitely feel spiritual, and feel that there is some [higher power]. I don't know if it's Allah, or God, or if there's multiple gods. I feel that there's some sort of higher power, but [I look at] the Bible now as something that man wrote.”

Brandon, 37
Not spiritual at all / Not religious at all (Agnostic)

In focus group conversations, people used a wide variety of words to name the higher power they believe in—and embraced the fact that others may use different language to talk about God.

While many named “God” as the higher power they believe in, they explained that others might not call it the same thing.

“*To me, spirituality has to incorporate God in some sense. Again, it doesn’t have to be the word ‘God’ since everybody doesn’t use that, but whatever your higher being is.”*

Shannon, 50

Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Christian: Non-denominational)

“*However we would describe it, source, infinite intelligence, is so vast that a word like God, which probably everybody has their version of or flavor of ... rather than being a unifying word, becomes more of a challenging frame, because people have so much invested in their version, as opposed to spirituality, which actually is able to sort of transcend some of the brand preferences.”*

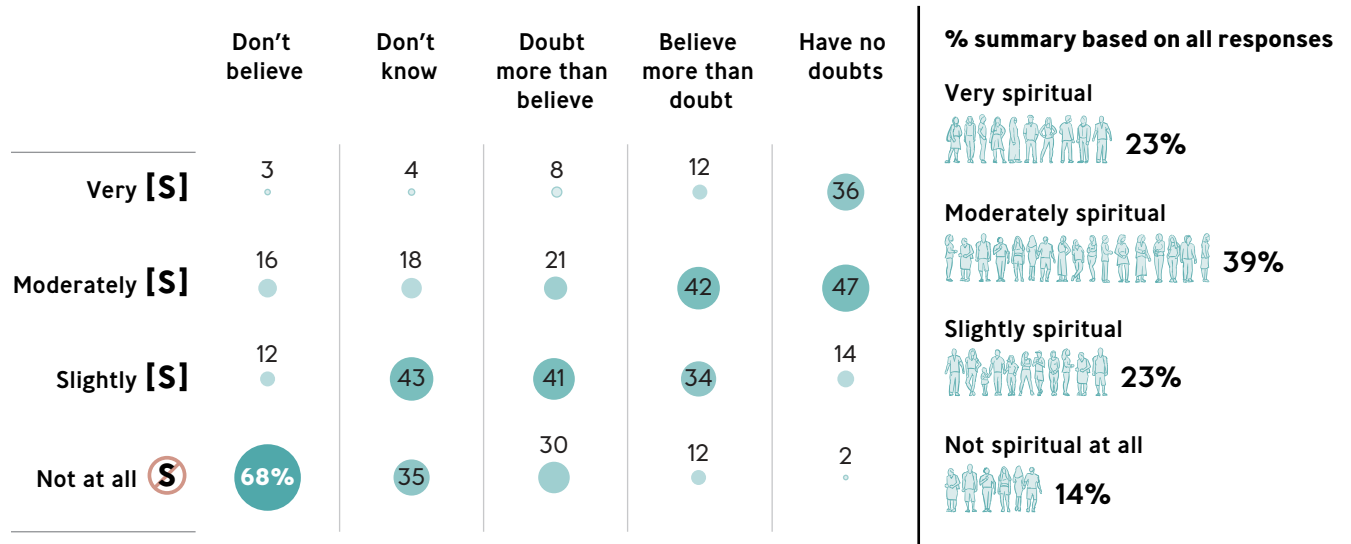
Mark, 52

Moderately spiritual / Not religious at all (Jewish)

Not everyone who considers themselves spiritual believes in a higher power.

Several people who described themselves as agnostic spoke to how their sense of spirituality did not require a belief in God or confidence in the existence of a divine being. They shared in focus groups or interviews how they could practice their spirituality regardless of that disbelief.

“To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Response options to the question were as follows: (1) I don't believe in a higher power; (2) I don't know whether there is a higher power, and I don't believe there is any way to find out; (3) I doubt a higher power's existence more than I believe; (4) I believe in a higher power's existence more than I doubt; (5) I know a higher power exists and I have no doubts about it; (6) Don't know.

“ I don't feel like I have to have a belief in something or [need to] be religious to have a spiritual connection with myself and others.”

Tara, 32

Moderately spiritual / Slightly religious (Agnostic)

EXPERIENCES

How do people experience spirituality on a daily basis?



In the focus groups and interviews, people of all spiritual and religious self-identifications shared examples of experiences they described as spiritual.

Some people shared singular moments from many years ago that uniquely moved them. Others offered examples of daily encounters with the divine, with others, or with the natural world.

Some people described these experiences as “deeply moving,” or as “something I couldn’t explain.” They shared examples that “lifted me out of myself,” that “made me feel a sense of wonder,” or “made me feel a sense of belonging.” Themes included senses of awe, belonging, clarity, connection, discomfort, love, peace, mystery, presence, scale, self, significance, and transformation. Several people described experiences with death, dying, or communing with dead relatives, while others shared examples of birth or new life.

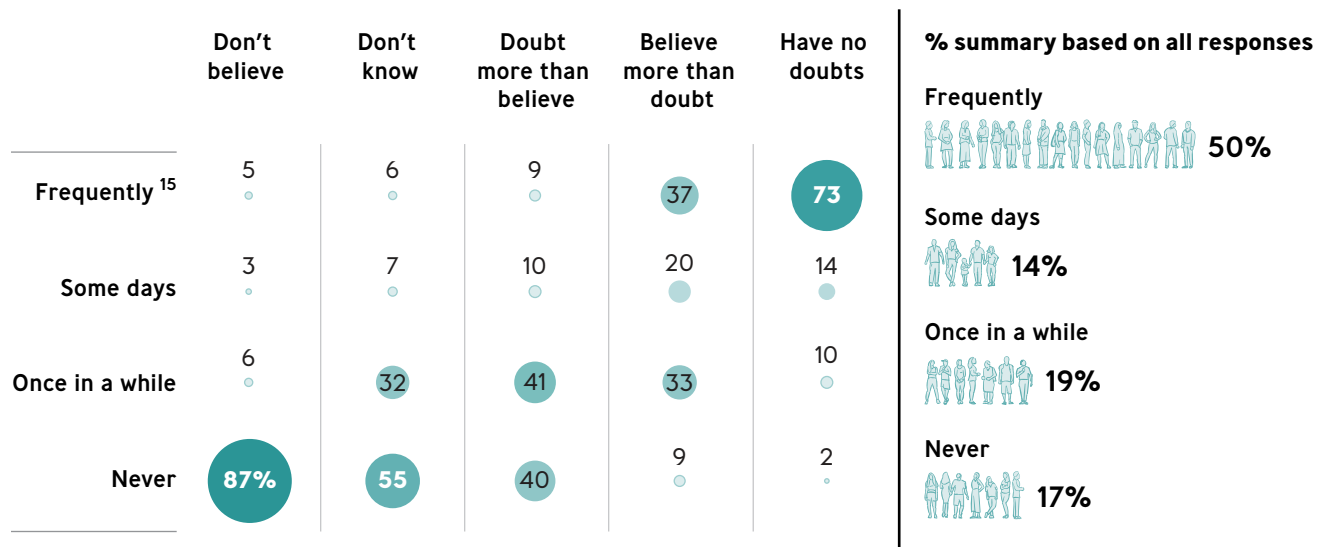
While it’s not feasible to quantify the breadth and depth of these diverse spiritual experiences, the survey included several questions to further understand regular experiences with God or a sense of the divine. We found that even some of those who don’t believe in a higher power, don’t know, or doubt whether there is a higher power, still experience divine presence or love at least once in a while.

The survey questions in this section drew from the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale, a widely used measure of ordinary spiritual experiences developed by Lynn Underwood.¹⁴ This scale assesses a variety of ways that people sense divine presence in their lives, including love from God, selfless love from others, transcendent presence through awe of creation, and gratitude for life. Spiritual experiences like these have been shown to fuel people’s faith, propel them to act in the world in loving ways, and influence how people give of themselves to others.

Half of respondents expressed frequently feeling the presence of a higher power or divine being.

Over half of people who reported strong belief said they feel such a presence at least every day. Some of those who do not believe in a higher power, or doubt, still report having this experience at least once in a while. In conversation, people recalled specific, powerful moments of sensing the divine that made a lasting impression, as well as regular, fleeting feelings of warmth or peace.

“How often do you feel the presence of a higher power—whether it be God, gods, or some other divine source or universal energy?”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Response options to the question were as follows: (1) I don't believe in a higher power; (2) I don't know whether there is a higher power, and I don't believe there is any way to find out; (3) I doubt a higher power's existence more than I believe; (4) I believe in a higher power's existence more than I doubt; (5) I know a higher power exists and I have no doubts about it; (6) Don't know.

“When I was in high school, I overdosed. [...] It was very, very intense. It felt like there was like a parent in there with me in the room, helping me through it, [but] I was alone. ... It was probably the closest thing I would describe to spirituality.”

Deshawna, 21
Very spiritual / Very religious (Catholic)

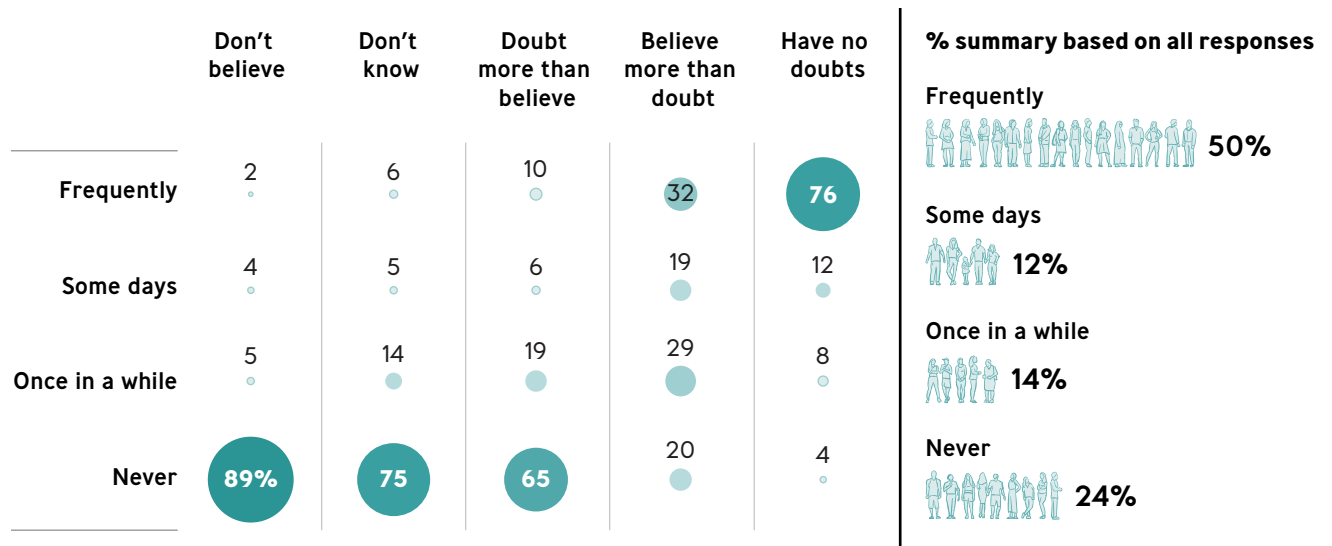
“When I was traveling, maybe 20 years ago, I was driving down the road and I had an overwhelming sense of peace that just hit me out of nowhere. Maybe some people would say it was God or something. I can't explain it.”

William, 69
Moderately spiritual / Not religious at all

Half of respondents say they frequently feel love from God or a divine being.

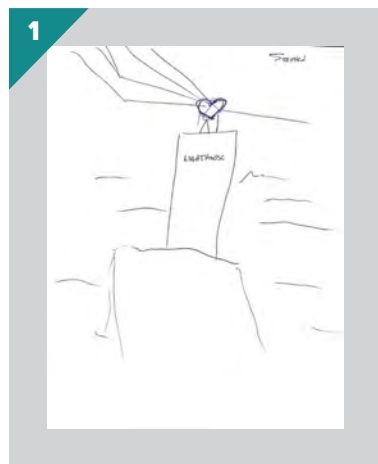
One in ten who don't believe in a higher power—and one in four who don't know whether a higher power exists—still feel divine love at least once in a while.

“How often do you feel a higher power’s love for you, directly? (Whether it be God, gods, or some other divine source or universal energy)”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Response options to the question were as follows: (1) I don't believe in a higher power; (2) I don't know whether there is a higher power, and I don't believe there is any way to find out; (3) I doubt a higher power's existence more than I believe; (4) I believe in a higher power's existence more than I doubt; (5) I know a higher power exists and I have no doubts about it; (6) Don't know.



1 “If you're going to be an accepting vessel of Jesus' word, then you have to be willing to focus that love that's poured upon you on other people. So, I visualize a lighthouse, accepting God's grace, and channeling that out to people in need.”

Stephen, 52

Very spiritual / Very religious (Protestant)

“ I've had the experience praying, trying to figure out where I belonged ... and at times I just would have a peace wash over me and I would know that it would be okay ... as long as I'm trying my best and doing my best.”

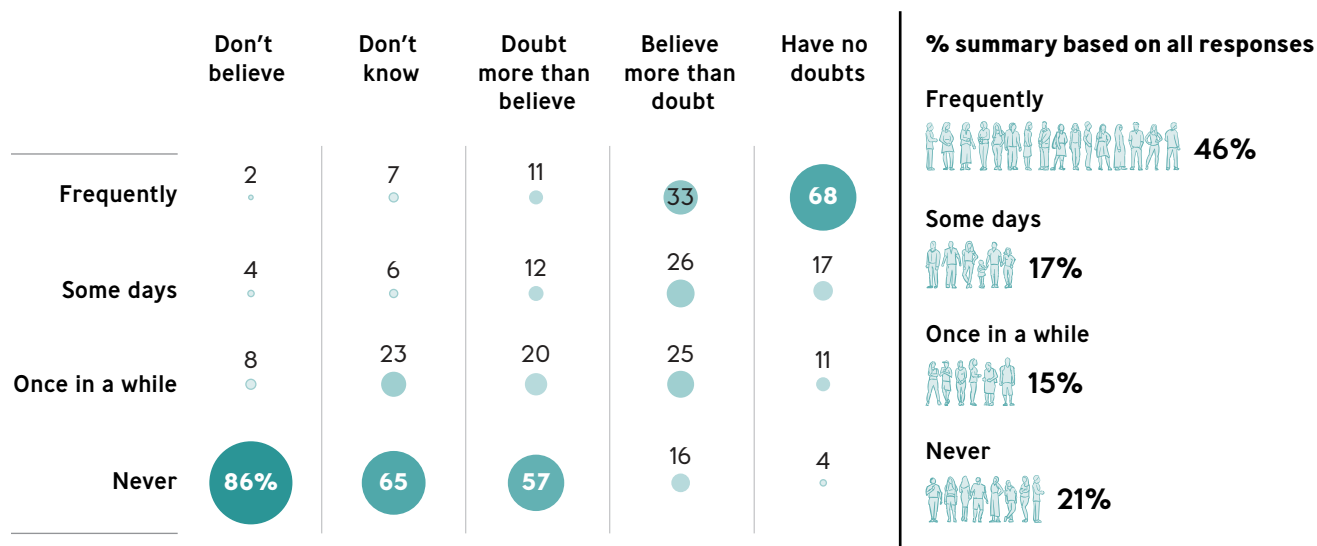
Helen, 49

Moderately spiritual / Very religious (Mormon)

Nearly half of respondents say they frequently feel divine love through others.

Focus group participants frequently described experiencing divine love during moments of life and death, such as the birth of their child or a death of a relative.

“How often do you feel a higher power’s love for you, through others? (Whether it be God, gods, or some other divine source or universal energy)”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Response options to the question were as follows: (1) I don't believe in a higher power; (2) I don't know whether there is a higher power, and I don't believe there is any way to find out; (3) I doubt a higher power's existence more than I believe; (4) I believe in a higher power's existence more than I doubt; (5) I know a higher power exists and I have no doubts about it; (6) Don't know.

“When [a friend] had her 40th birthday, we had a huge campout. We did several intention things, like where do you want to be in five years, 10 years, 20 years? We put them into a fire. That evening was the same kind of almost out-of-body feeling, because we were so close.”

Debra, 56
Moderately spiritual / Not religious at all

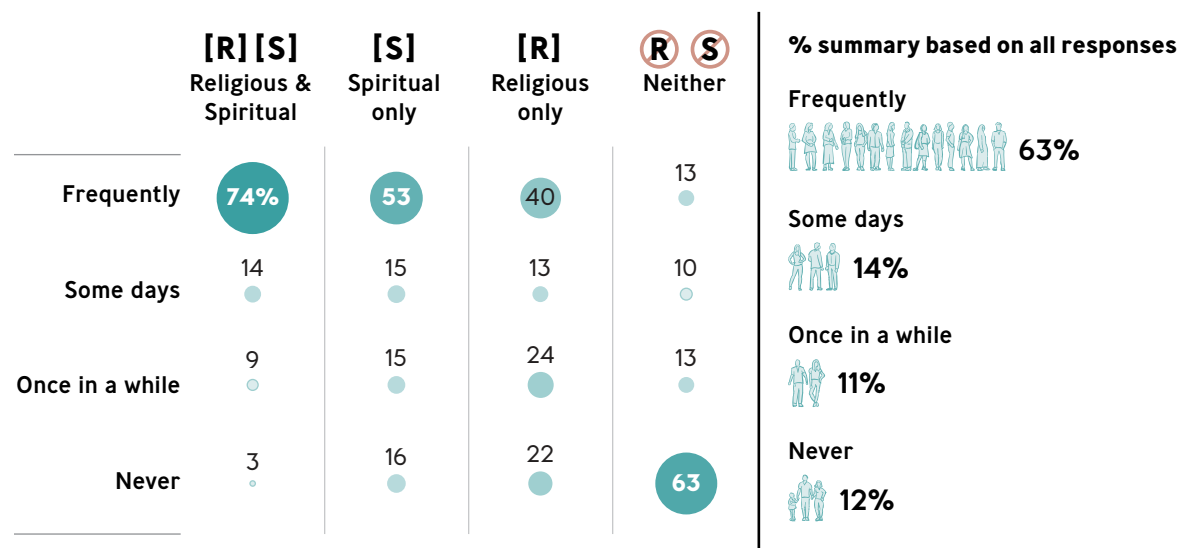
“I was holding [my ten-year-old niece] when she passed. It was the light on her face and the light through the window and I just deeply felt her spirit leave her body. [Her illness] was a deeply spiritual process as there were so many people affected in praying and coming together to try to support. [...] That connection that was felt amongst all of us was just palpable love.”

Nancy, 54
Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Episcopalian)

2 in 3 people frequently feel touched by the beauty of creation.

In focus groups, people of all spiritual and religious identifications, and even those who said they were not spiritual, described specific experiences—recently or long ago—of peace, awe, mystery, or wonder in the natural world.

“How often do you feel touched by the beauty of creation?”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Response options to the question were as follows: (1) I don't believe in a higher power; (2) I don't know whether there is a higher power, and I don't believe there is any way to find out; (3) I doubt a higher power's existence more than I believe; (4) I believe in a higher power's existence more than I doubt; (5) I know a higher power exists and I have no doubts about it; (6) Don't know.

“ Looking up at the stars or the clouds or the moon ... I felt like I was wrapped up in myself, my own desires or fears or anger. And then the cocoon of self fell away. And for a minute I thought, this isn't just about me or what I think or what I feel or what I'm afraid of. This is about other things.”

Arieh, 40
Not spiritual at all / not religious at all

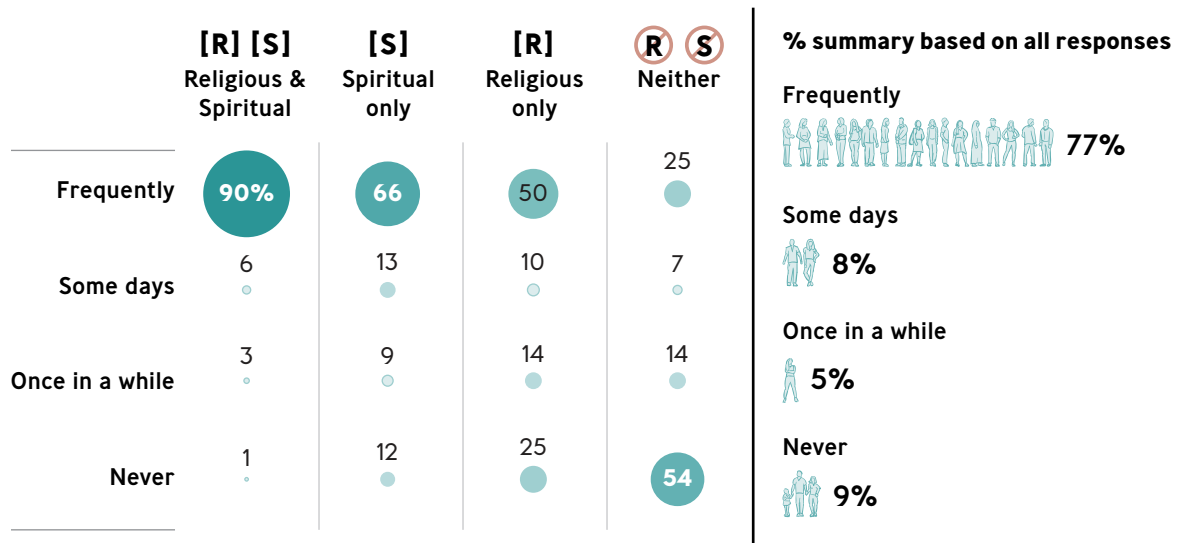
“ Every time I see a certain animal, like a butterfly, that's a really small spiritual experience. Because to me, they're just so interesting how they have short lives, but their whole lives are spent with a purpose for making sure their species stays alive.”

Amanda, 21
Moderately spiritual / Not religious at all

3 in 4 people frequently feel thankful for their blessings.

People in focus groups described both moments of gratitude and regular practices of gratitude. Some described how the experience of receiving unearned blessings compelled them to shift their own lives or pass it along to others.

“How often do you feel thankful for your blessings?”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Response options to the question were as follows: (1) I don't believe in a higher power; (2) I don't know whether there is a higher power, and I don't believe there is any way to find out; (3) I doubt a higher power's existence more than I believe; (4) I believe in a higher power's existence more than I doubt; (5) I know a higher power exists and I have no doubts about it; (6) Don't know.

“ [I don't pray] very often. What I usually try and do is really talk about all the things I'm grateful for. ... My life has been kind of crazy but in general I still think I'm a really lucky person.”

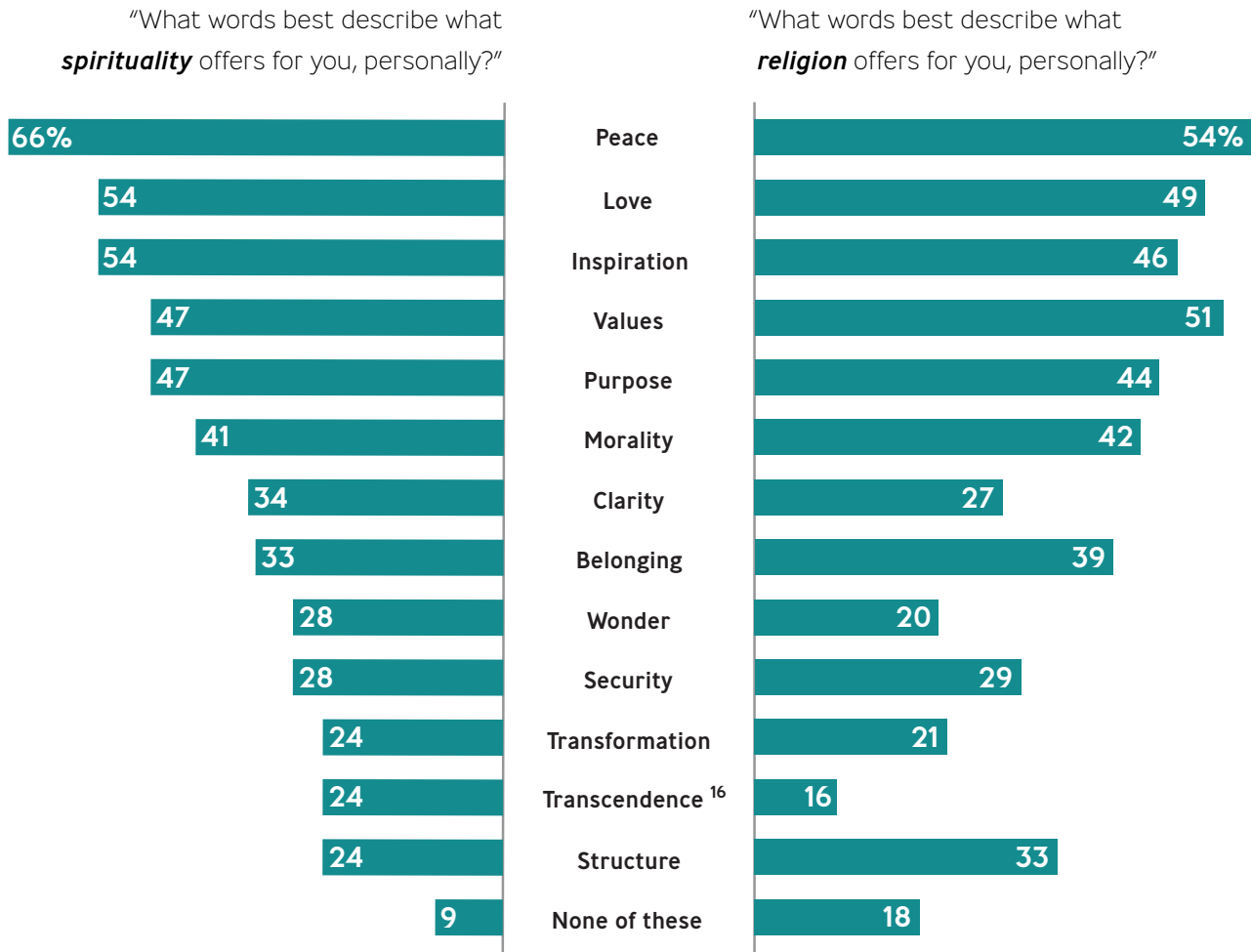
Laura, 49
Slightly spiritual / Not religious at all (Agnostic)

“ It's a sense of contentment ... that makes you take a step back and be extremely thankful for what you have and have a deeper sense of yourself and be extremely thoughtful of that experience.”

Brenna, 27
Slightly spiritual / Moderately religious (Religious science)

WHAT DOES SPIRITUALITY OFFER US?

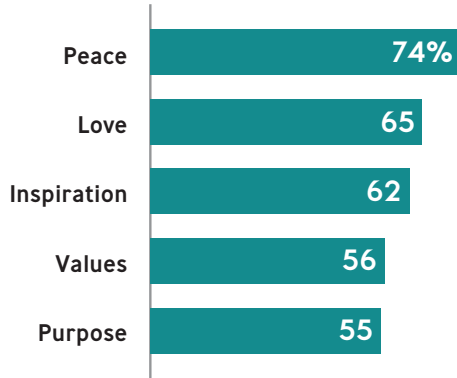
During our focus groups and interviews, participants described in words and drawings how spirituality made them feel, how it showed up in their daily lives, and why it was important to them. From those conversations, we developed a list of possible benefits that people derive from spirituality. The survey invited respondents to share the benefits they gained from spirituality, as well as from religion, to illuminate reasons why people might seek out spirituality in the first place.



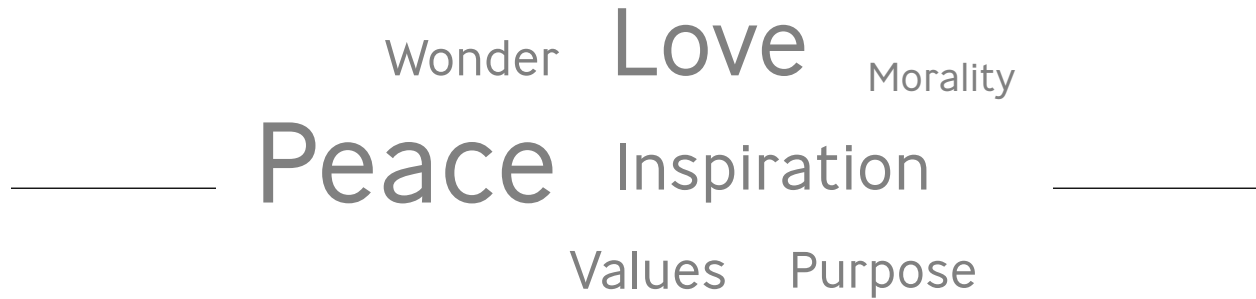
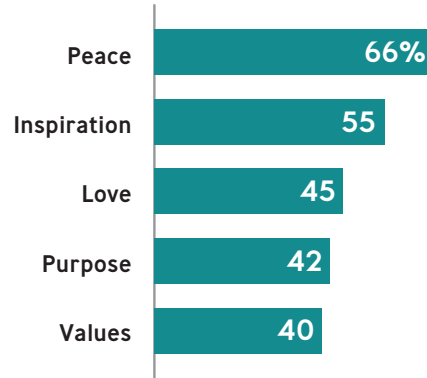
Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

“What words best describe what *spirituality* offers for you, personally?”

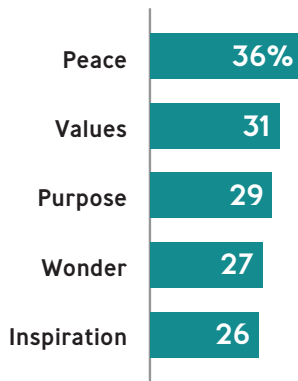
[R] [S] Religious & Spiritual



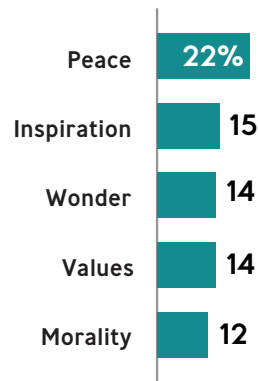
[S] Spiritual only



[R] Religious only



[R] [S] Neither spiritual nor religious



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

ASPIRATION

How do people see spirituality as part of the type of person they want to be?



In focus groups and interviews, participants shared a dynamic dimension to spirituality: It was something they were working toward, or something that could help them become a better version of themselves.

People made drawings of paths they were following, and offered examples of how spirituality was an experience of seeking and growth. Others shared how their spirituality inspired them to serve others and make their community or their world a better place.

Our aspirations are our ideas about the people we want to be and the lives we want to live. These desires can drive our actions, as we strive to live up to our ideal

image of ourselves—our “aspirational identity.” We try to act in ways that reflect and reinforce our aspirational identities. People in focus groups and interviews often spoke about spirituality in that way—as emblematic of the type of person they wanted to be. Aspirations for a better life and a better world drive so much of human achievement, whether it’s an individual attaining a personal goal or society advancing to a higher level. Helping people realize their aspirations—to become aware of them and bring them to life—can propel personal growth and lead to human flourishing and societal change.

EXPERT INSIGHT

Informing and inspiring the type of person we want to be



Pamela Ebstyne King, Ph.D.

Peter L. Benson Chair of Applied Developmental Science

Thrive Center for Human Development

School of Psychology

Fuller Theological Seminary

The findings of this study reveal that spirituality is a source of aspiration for many in the U.S. That is, for many persons, spirituality motivates and directs who they are becoming. Spirituality informs ideals and fuels behaviors, indicating that it may be an under-tapped resource for personal and social transformation.

The health and racism pandemics of 2020 have spurred social and personal upheaval, prompting many people to evaluate their aspirational convictions, and even question traditional sources of meaning, values, and beliefs. The civic and religious structures within the U.S. have been radically shifting. These traditionally reliable sources of trust, belonging, and ideals have been eroding, forcing Americans to find meaning and purpose on their own, with little or no institutional guidance.

More than half of the study participants reported a desire to become more spiritual. Not only is spirituality linked to inspiration and growth, but it is also a resource for direction and guidance. Through spirituality people potentially have access to prosocial ideals and beliefs, a community to support them, and a source of transcendence that motivates behaviors aligned with their spiritual ideals. From a psychological perspective, when people cognitively and emotionally transcend themselves, other-oriented beliefs and goals are integrated into their identities that become the basis for moral and civic identity and result in the formation of noble purpose.

“

Not only is spirituality linked to inspiration and growth, but it is also a resource for direction and guidance.”

Ideological commitments and purpose further guide, direct, and organize identity, worldviews, social relationships, goals, and behaviors towards other-oriented ends. Spirituality and religion tend to provide explicit and clear sets of prosocial ideals; offer historic or living examples and social support; and profound experiences of belonging, love, grace, and significance—in a way that motivates people to sustain their commitment to moral and civic ends.

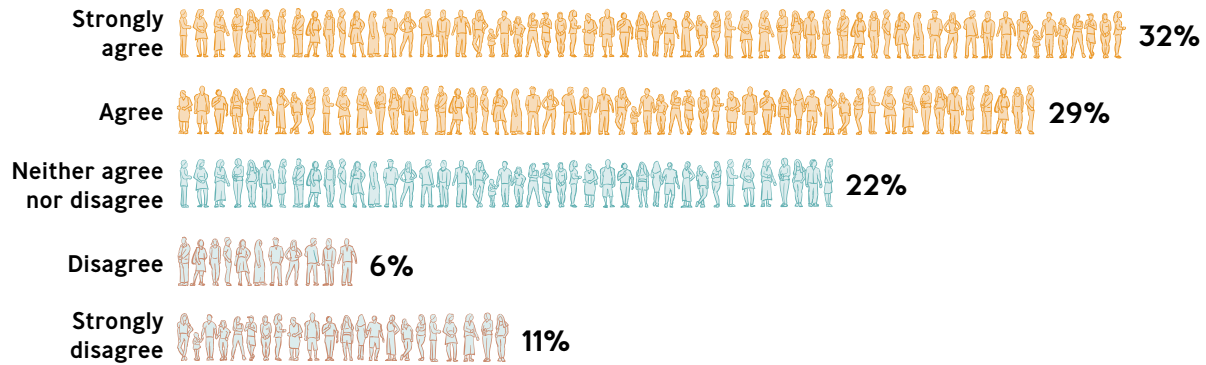
In this way, spirituality is aspirational and serves to motivate and fuel people towards pursuing lives that matter now, and in most cases, in the future. Because of the significance of spiritual beliefs and goals, people exhibit a high level of fidelity and are motivated to live in alignment to their ideals and grow in virtuous and civic engagement. The experience of connection, awareness, and integration enable spirituality at its best to be an invitation to a life beyond the immediate and mundane and to what could be—rather than what should be. In this way, self-transcendent experiences, prosocial beliefs, and engaged community inspires and supports one's journey to construct a thriving life of transcendent meaning, purpose, and engagement.



3 in 5 people aspire to be more spiritual.

Many people in focus groups and interviews described the qualities of a spiritual person as exemplary of the type of person they wanted to be.

"I aspire to be a [more] spiritual person."¹⁷



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

“*I’m striving to be these things; I’m not exactly these things. ... The person that I have in mind that I would consider to be sort of be spiritual has positive outlooks.*”

Michelle, 51
Moderately spiritual / Not religious at all (Catholic)

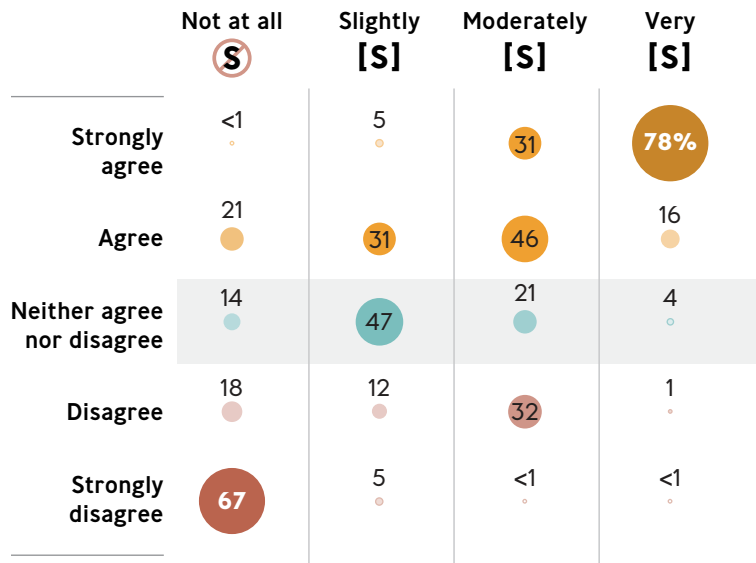
“*It’s ... something that I’m working towards which is having a richer, more wise and at peace understanding of the world. And I hope with age I’ll get there, but yeah, I’m not there [yet].*”

Sarah, 34
Slightly spiritual / Not religious at all (Agnostic)

Those who see themselves as very spiritual also aspire to be even more spiritual.

In focus groups and interviews, people described spirituality as dynamic rather than static. Several wrestled with calling themselves “very” spiritual because they understood spirituality as a journey without an endpoint—that there is no way to master being spiritual.

“I aspire to be a [more] spiritual person.”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.



1 “It’s a curvy road ... I guess I just thought about the path that you take along the way of life, to get where you wanna be spiritually.”

Dan, 42
Slightly spiritual / Not at all religious

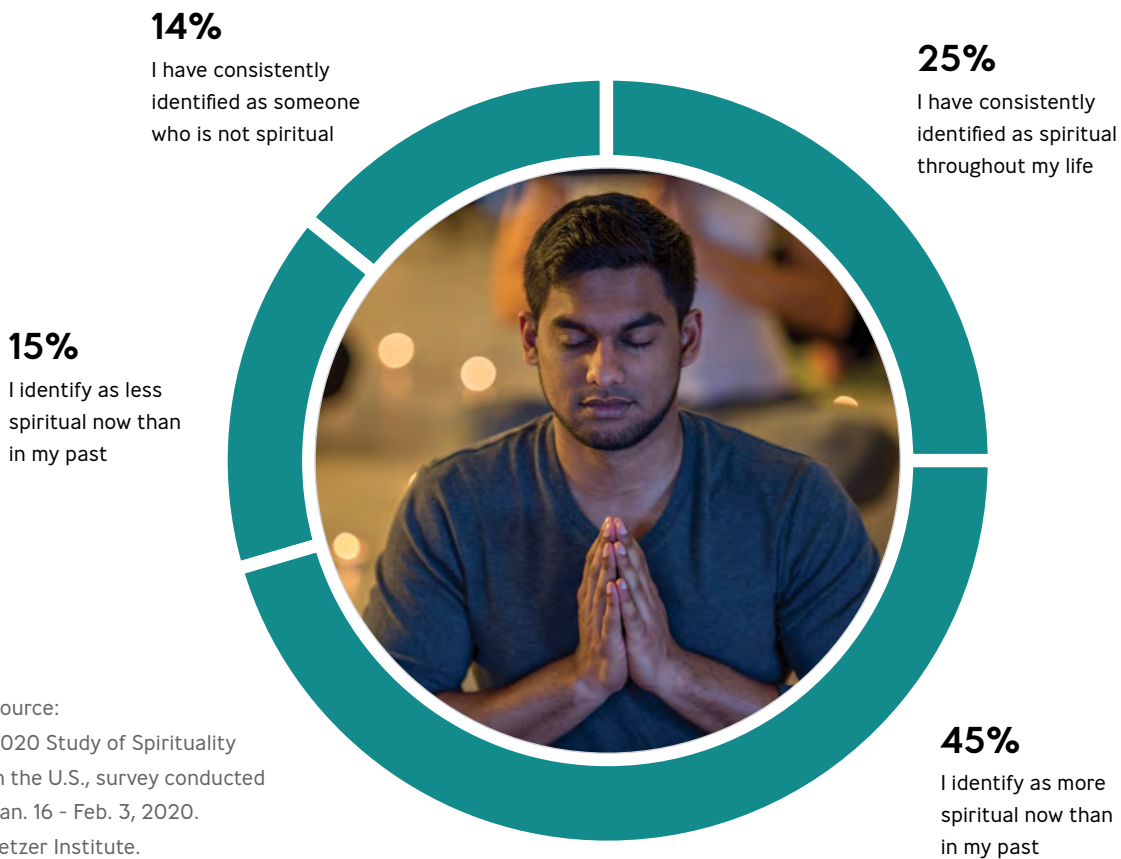
“ [Spirituality is something to be] nurtured and cultivated and supported, like a plant. A seed.”

Nancy, 54
Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Episcopalian)

45% of people say they have become more spiritual over the course of their lives.

In conversation, several people gave examples of how their spirituality evolved from being a passive part of their religious upbringing, to a more meaningful, more active practice today. Others shared how their sense of spirituality now is related to their personal growth.

“Please indicate which of the following describes you:”



Source:
2020 Study of Spirituality
in the U.S., survey conducted
Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020.
Fetzer Institute.

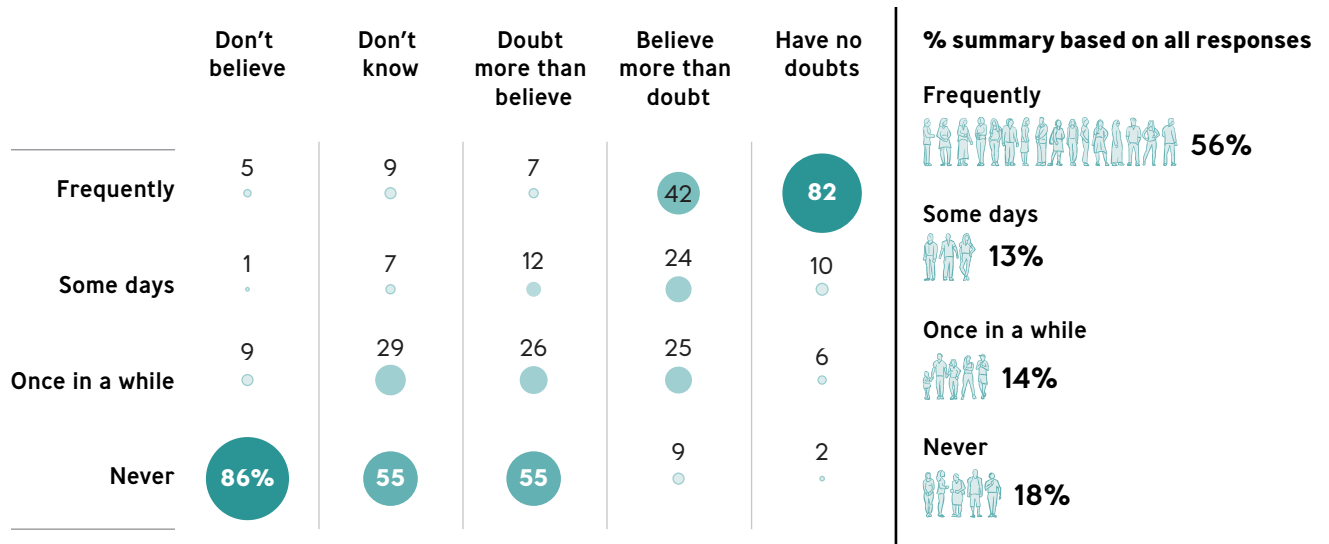
“ *In the past year, I’ve been getting more into reading Buddhist texts and listening to podcasts and practicing meditation. That has been really big in just making sure that I’m being the best person that I can be.*”

Mark, 29
Very spiritual / Not religious at all (Buddhist)

4 in 5 people desire to be closer to God.

Some focus group and interview participants spoke about a sense of yearning for a relationship with God—including those who did not necessarily believe in a higher power of some kind. In the survey, nearly half of people who said they don't know if a higher power exists or doubt the existence of a higher power said they desire to be closer to a higher power, at least once in a while.

"How often do you desire to be closer to a higher power—whether it be God, gods, or some other divine source or universal energy?"¹⁸



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Response options to the question were as follows: (1) I don't believe in a higher power; (2) I don't know whether there is a higher power, and I don't believe there is any way to find out; (3) I doubt a higher power's existence more than I believe; (4) I believe in a higher power's existence more than I doubt; (5) I know a higher power exists and I have no doubts about it; (6) Don't know.

“The more I feel close to God the more at peace I feel, and I still haven't gotten to peacefulness with death, even though we all know we have to get there. That's my goal and I work towards feeling that peace.”

Helen, 49
Moderately spiritual / Very religious (Mormon)

PRACTICES

What activities do people engage in as part of their regular spiritual practice?



In the study, we found that people identify a wide range of activities as spiritual, and they are regularly engaging in those practices both within and outside religious institutions.

Descriptions of spirituality, self-identification, belief, and aspirations reflect people’s personal reflection of what it means to be spiritual. But as we found in people’s drawings and in conversation, spirituality for many constitutes both inner experience and outer action. People described all kinds of ways they regularly practice spirituality in their lives.

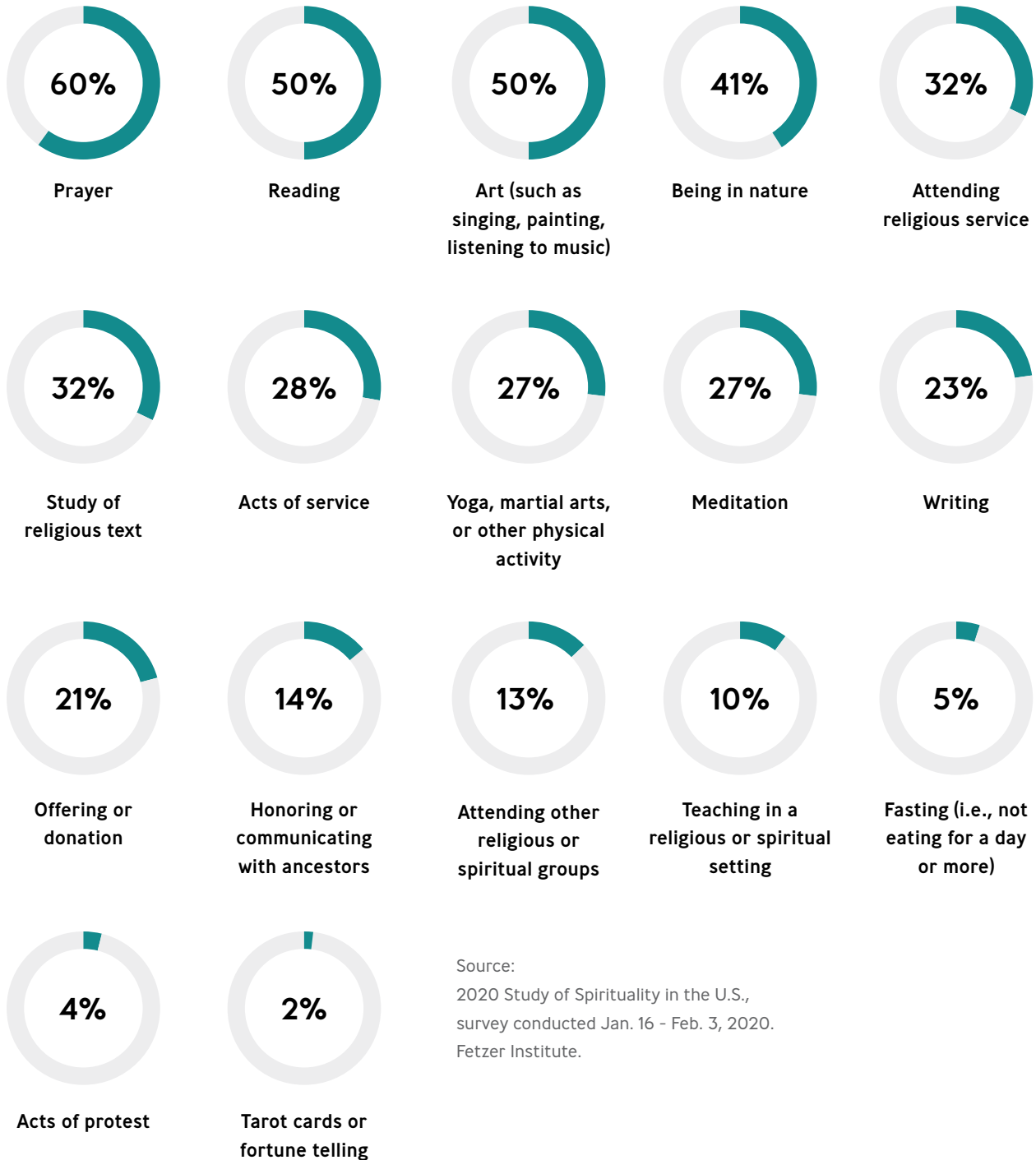
Survey respondents reviewed a list of seventeen activities generated from spiritual and religious practices shared by focus group and interview participants. When asked how often they engage in each of them as spiritual—and then as religious—activities, 88% said they engage in at least one spiritual or religious activity at least once a week.

People found spirituality in devotional practices such as prayer, study of religious text, and attending religious services; in experiential practices such as art, being in nature, writing, and reading; and in relational practices with others such as attending religious or spiritual groups, or teaching in a religious or spiritual setting.

In open-ended survey responses, people detailed other spiritual activities they practice. They shared activities that ranged from formal to informal, from personal to communal. Examples included talking with God, Jesus, other people, or animals; interacting with family and friends; acts of everyday kindness; taking care of their mental health; environmental stewardship; caring for animals; sexuality; drug use; Alcoholics Anonymous; and learning something new.

Respondents reported regularly engaging in many kinds of activities they identify as spiritual.

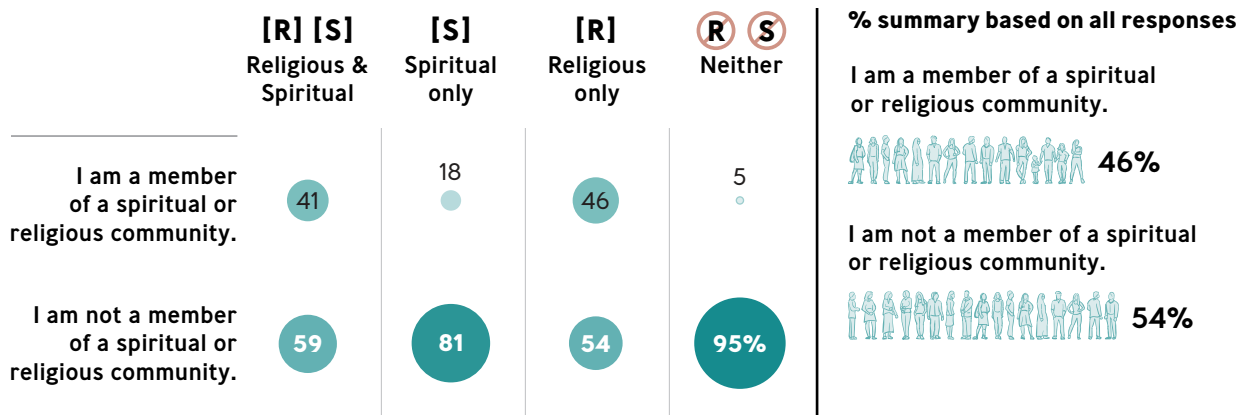
“How often do you engage in the following as spiritual activities?” (Weekly or more)



While the definition of “membership” varies tremendously across religious groups, nearly half of people say they are a member of a spiritual or religious community.

Four in five people who are spiritual but not religious are not part of a spiritual or religious community. In qualitative research, people expressed a yearning or appreciation for the sense of belonging, relationship, or guidance a spiritual or religious community provides.

“Which response best describes you?”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

“ I think community is important, and I do think that there’s a sense of being centered when I actually go [to church]. There’s something almost tangible about that. And I love the musical part of church, as well. [...] It’s just a different way of spending your energy than the other 24/7.”

Laura, 49
Slightly spiritual / Not religious at all (Agnostic)

“ I was six or seven when 9/11 happened. [...] I kind of found refuge—not refuge, but more of an identity in people that I was going to my mosque with then. [...] The teachings were important but I think that the friendships that I made, they were important as well.”

Adam, 23
Slightly spiritual / Slightly religious (Muslim)

EXPERT INSIGHT

Spiritual inquiry, civic heft



Krista Tippett, M.Div.

Founder and CEO

The On Being Project

This serious look at the meaning of spirituality—its actual substance and impact in contemporary lives—is necessary and welcome. From beliefs to practices and descriptions of identity, the research affirms in interesting and intricate ways what I’ve observed since the turn of this century.

While historical, traditional words and forms of religious identification are transforming—as is happening with all of our communal disciplines—this part of the human experience is becoming more important and more substantive, not less so. “Spirituality” is an over-used, watered down word; in journalism it has largely retained associations with a superficial “new age” of the late 20th century. The very phrase “spiritual but not religious” is inadequate.

There is valuable articulation here, reflected in the emergent realization on the part of participants themselves, that spiritual inquiry and practice have civic heft. Spirituality as expressed in this research shows a pattern of looking inward and re-centering, but it also reveals how we look beyond ourselves.

In our world of social rupture, this investigation of the inner ground and its resonance outwardly is critical to the scale and depth of transformation that our life together requires. This is civic work and it is human, spiritual work.

“

Spirituality ... shows a pattern of looking inward and re-centering, but it also reveals how we look beyond ourselves.”

IN WHAT WAYS ARE PEOPLE PRACTICING SPIRITUALITY BY HELPING OTHERS?

People offered numerous examples of formal and informal civic or prosocial actions they engage in and consider to be spiritual. In a qualitative analysis of open-ended survey responses about spiritual activities, we coded the civic and prosocial actions people shared—defining it as “any action to benefit another person or society.”

People of all religious and spiritual backgrounds referenced following the Golden Rule—to “treat others as you’d like to be treated.” Many wrote in the survey about “paying it forward,” “being kind to other people,” or “doing acts of kindness.” They described “being good to your neighbor,” “showing love to others,” and “loving unconditionally.” They engaged in “acts of service,” “giving a helping hand,” and “giving back.”

“What other activities do you engage in that you consider spiritual, if any?”



*"Being in the present;
honoring people,
animals and plants;
leaving no impact; zero
waste and minimalism."*



*"Being open to others'
perspectives with no desire
to impose mine upon them.
Accepting and respecting
others' self-identifications
with no judgment."*

*"Being a vegan
I am connected to
all sentient beings...
and nature."*



*"Encouraging and helping those in
difficult circumstances. Sometimes
bringing them to church services,
prayer groups and Bible studies.
Volunteering for causes dear to
my heart. Making myself aware of
political issues so that I can vote
my values. Encouraging children
in faith. Hospitality, especially to
those in need of friendship."*



SPIRITUALITY IN ACTION

*Exploring the Relationship Between
Spirituality and Community, Civic,
and Political Action*

“For me, spirituality combines a lot of things because in order to be in tune with the spirit, it’s who I need to go help or who I need to go serve. ... [It’s] to take what I know and serve those around me, love my neighbor, minister to those that I know need help or those that I am prompted to.”

Helen, 45-54
Moderately spiritual / Very religious

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND CIVIC ACTION

Are people who identify as more spiritual more likely to actively engage in their communities, and believe it is important?



We found that spirituality and actions that benefit others or society are highly correlated: The people who identify as most spiritual are most likely to engage in all kinds of prosocial, civic, and political activities—and believe those actions are important.

In the research, we asked people about the ways they engage with others, in their community, and in politics. These actions ranged from informal prosocial behaviors such as getting to know their neighbors; to community behaviors such as engagement in local events; to civic actions such as volunteering; to political actions such as reaching out to a public official or voting.

The survey showed that the people who identified as most spiritual were also most likely to engage in those outer actions.

We also found that people who identify as slightly spiritual are least likely to engage in prosocial and civic activities—even less so than those who identify as not spiritual at all. These findings point to the importance of understanding the people who overtly claim they are not spiritual as a unique, distinct group—many of whom may hold civic-mindedness as a component of their secular ideology. They also invite further questions about the people who self-identify as slightly spiritual, and the qualities that draw people to this label.

The more strongly a person identifies as spiritual, the more likely they are to believe it is very important to make a difference in their communities and contribute to greater good in the world.

Importance of civic action by people with different levels of spirituality

Respondents who say the following actions are "very important"

To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?

Not at all **(S)** Slightly **[S]** Moderately **[S]** Very **[S]**

Making a difference in my community



Being informed of community issues



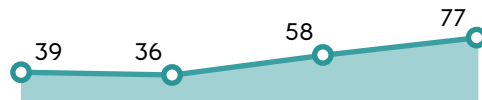
Welcoming people who are different from me into my community



Speaking up when other people have been wronged



Helping other people in need



Volunteering



Supporting causes or organizations that are important to me



Contributing to the greater good in the world



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

The more a person identifies as spiritual, the more likely they are to engage with others in their communities and to take actions such as volunteering and donating.

Participation in civic action by people with different levels of spirituality

Respondents who say the following actions "describe me very well"

To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?

Not at all **S** Slightly **[S]** Moderately **[S]** Very **[S]**

Working with others, I make positive changes in my community.



I stay informed of events in my community.



I make an effort to attend community events.



I make an effort to know my neighbors.



I make an effort to interact with strangers.



I participate in organized volunteer opportunities.



I donate to causes or organizations that are important to me.



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

The more a person identifies as spiritual, the more likely they are to vote, to speak out on political and social issues, and to get involved in politics and social movements.

Participation in political action by people with different levels of spirituality

Respondents who say they have done the following actions during the last 12 months

Attended a meeting to talk about political or social concerns

Telephoned, written a letter to, or visited a government official to express your views on a public issue

Given money to a candidate, campaign, or an organization concerned with a political or social issue

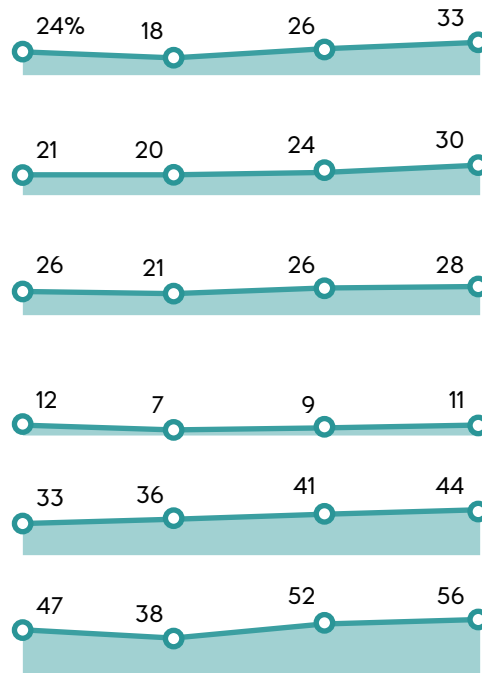
Joined in a protest march, rally, or demonstration

Signed a petition on the Internet or on paper about a political or social issue

Respondents who say they "always" vote

To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?

Not at all **S** Slightly **[S]** Moderately **[S]** Very **[S]**



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

EXPERT INSIGHT

Fuel and oxygen for social and political change



Rev. Adam Russell Taylor

Executive Director

Sojourners

This timely and groundbreaking study presents some good news about the synergy between spirituality and community engagement. That the more strongly someone identifies as spiritual, the more likely they are to hold prosocial attitudes and take civic action, provides hopeful news about how we can help to heal and revitalize our democracy in the face of such dangerous levels of polarization and while we address the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice.

Throughout the nation's history, spirituality and religion have inspired and fueled many of the social movements that have reformed and transformed America, from women's suffrage to civil rights. They have also played a key role in undergirding the pro-life movement and other traditionally conservative causes. While some of the movements of today may on their face seem less rooted in religious institutions than in the past, many activists and leaders, including within the Black Lives Matter movement, continue to be motivated by deep and resilient spirituality.

These findings provide further insight and evidence that spirituality provides both fuel and oxygen for social and political change. Spirituality compels people to engage in action and activities tied to creating a better nation and world—and helps to sustain that action. As a result, nurturing and deepening spirituality serves as both an antidote to combat civic apathy and disillusionment as well as a catalyst for community and civic engagement.

“
Spirituality compels people to engage in action and activities tied to creating a better nation and world—and helps to sustain that action.”

EXPERT INSIGHT

American Muslims' commitment to community



Alisa M. Perkins, Ph.D. Anthropology

Associate Professor

Department of Comparative Religion

Western Michigan University

Scholar with Institute for Social Policy and Understanding

Over the past decade, numerous social science scholars carrying out qualitative studies of Muslims in America have found that American Muslims, and especially American Muslim youth, have a heightened level of civic, community, and political engagement—including increased levels of voting and activism and faith-driven volunteering.

Survey responses back up this insight. For example, the rates of Muslims surveyed who engage in acts of service is high, with 92% reporting that they do so as a religious activity and 75% reporting that they do so as a spiritual activity. We also find that a majority of Muslims (76%) report that making a difference in the community is important to them, and a majority of Muslims (63%) reported that the statement “my spirituality inspires me to give back to my community” described them well.

Scholars have found that this drive to take part in community and civic life is due in part to the stigmatization that Muslims in the U.S. face. There is a resulting “representational burden” placed on Muslims to increase their civic engagement in part to disprove stereotypes. This can lead to fatigue and burnout among American Muslims since the pressure is so high, and the perceived predicted negative backlash for remaining inactive is so alarming. This population’s overall high levels of education and economic standing also contribute to their ability to take action and become visible in political and civic engagement.

“

Scholars have found a ... ‘representational burden’ placed on Muslims to increase their civic engagement in part to disprove stereotypes.”

A minority of Muslims (28%) report that they “telephoned, wrote a letter to, or visited a government official to express your views on a public issue” during the past 12 months. This is significant because it is the only community engagement question in which only a minority of Muslims surveyed reported having engaged in that activity.

The reason for less robust participation in political outreach may be that as a stigmatized minority, some Muslims in the U.S. may fear being considered unpatriotic or suspicious by the mainstream, or being labeled by the government as unpatriotic or troublesome in post 9/11 America. This is particularly salient during the age of the Muslim ban, when many Muslims fear surveillance, selective profiling, scapegoating, and stigmatization. There is more to learn about the factors that stop Muslims from expressing their political and community commitment in this way.

While this heightened level of civic engagement has positive effects on Muslims in the U.S. and society at large, it needs to be stressed that the push for civic engagement can also be a heavy burden and take away from the ability of Muslim Americans just to live as average citizens.



CONNECTION

To what do people experience a sense of connection, and how does it relate to their outer action?



In interviews and focus group conversations, people commonly drew or described a sense of connection—with themselves, with a higher power or divine being, with others living or dead, or with nature—as a fundamental part of a spiritual life.

The survey found that not only do many feel connected to a higher power, all of humanity, and the natural environment, but those who feel highly connected to either a higher power or humanity are more likely to take community, civic, and political action.

Feeling a sense of kinship with all of humanity is a high threshold to meet. It also stood out as a defining characteristic of spirituality. People spoke about connection to their family, to their community, to their country, and to all humans. A quote attributed to Albert Einstein gives a name to this increasingly vast sense of connection, inviting “widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” In this way, the survey explores the widest “circle of compassion” that embraces the whole of humanity.

EXPERT INSIGHT

Moving from “I” to “we”



Ruth Braunstein, Ph.D.

*Associate Professor of Sociology
University of Connecticut*

How do people’s feelings of connection to others relate to their civic and political action? We could imagine the causal arrow running from connection to action: People who feel a strong connection to their community, for example, may feel more invested in its future and willing to sacrifice their time, money, and even their lives for the good of the whole. But we could also imagine this causal arrow running from action to connection: When crowds of protesters swell the streets; when people stand in line to vote; when people volunteer together for a cause, each person ceases to be an “I” and comes to see themselves, however fleetingly, as part of a “we.”

Both of these possibilities are plausible, yet most of what we know about each involves people’s feelings of connection to relatively small-scale “we’s”—from small groups of people who are co-present to larger but still delimited “imagined communities” like the nation. We know relatively little about how this process works when people imagine a significantly wider “circle of compassion” like all of humanity or the entire natural world. How is this form of connection cultivated and strengthened? How does spirituality—alone or with religiosity—relate to this feeling of connection? And how is it related to civic and political action?

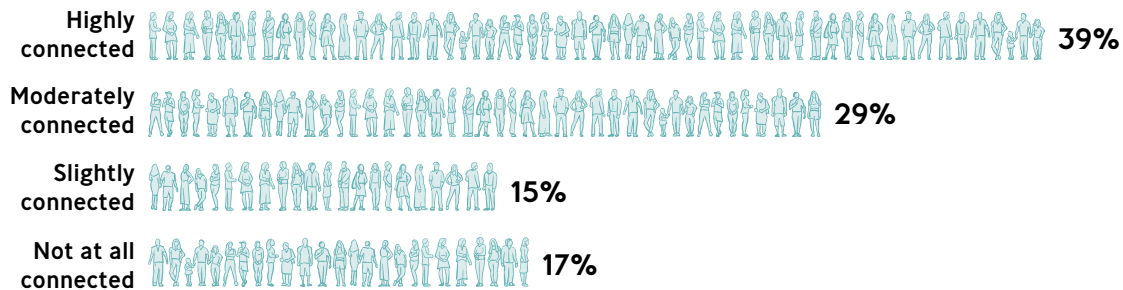
We are living in a moment in which strong connections to in-groups at the expense of out-groups threaten to divide the country and undermine humanity’s ability to solve global problems from COVID-19 to climate change. In this context, this study’s attention to spirituality’s role in widening our circles of compassion is timely and important.

“
We could imagine the causal arrow running from connection to action. [...] But we could also imagine this causal arrow running from action to connection.”

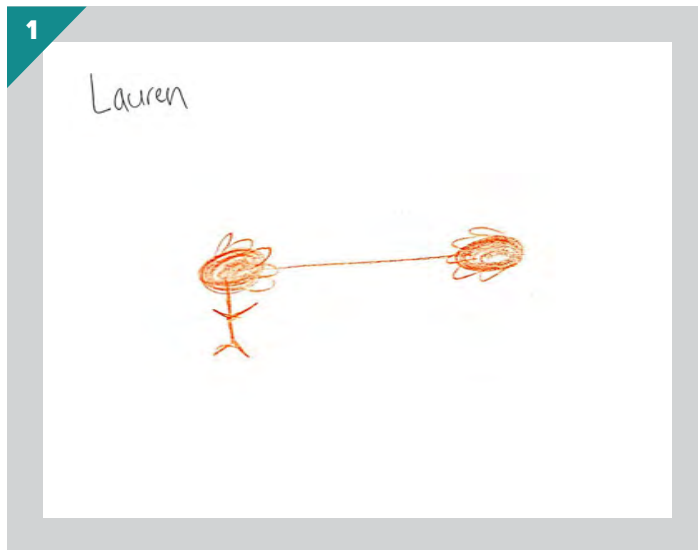
68% of people report feeling connected to a higher power of some kind.

Survey respondents were also likely to describe it as a strong connection. In conversation, many people described their connection with a higher power as a relationship—and one they cultivated through regular spiritual practices and actions.

“To what extent do you feel connected to a higher power—whether it be God, gods, or some other divine source or universal energy?”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

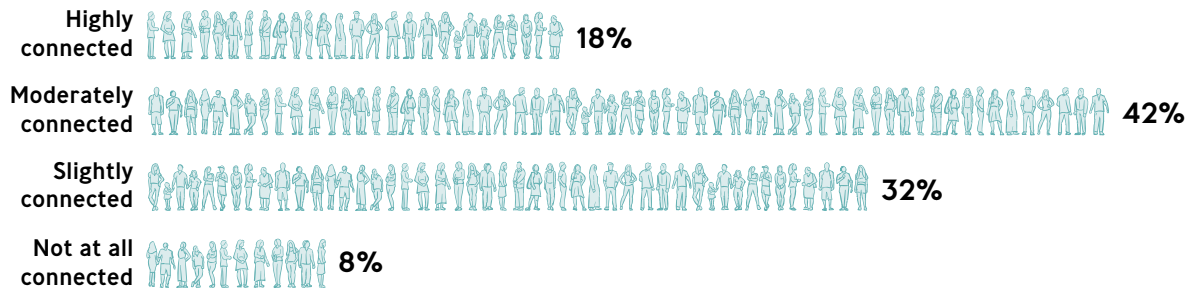


1
“It was more a relationship ... kind of taking the connection to another level, since it’s very personal. It means having a relationship with the higher power that I believe in and all that comes with that.”
Lauren, 36
Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Protestant)

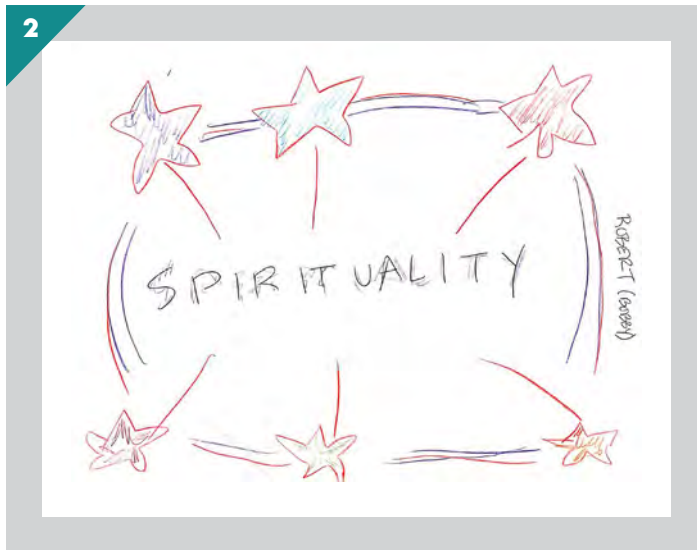
60% of people report feeling connected to all of humanity.

In focus groups and interviews, people offered a multitude of examples in which spirituality emerged through a sense of kinship with other people. Some shared about relationships with family members, others about relationships with friends or strangers they interacted with, and still others about a sense of connection with a global family.

“To what extent do you feel connected to all of humanity?”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.



“I’ve thought about this for decades because I walked away from organized religion a long time ago but I think there’s still a connectedness with human beings, all individuals. [...] There is some sort of human connectedness, nature is involved, and it’s just the whole world.”

Robert, 63
Not spiritual at all /
Not religious at all

71% of people report feeling connected to the natural environment.

Study participants offered specific examples of being in and feeling one with nature. Others described seeing themselves as part of an expansive, living world or universe.

“To what extent do you feel connected to the natural environment?”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.



3
“When I think of spirituality, I think of being connected to the earth. [...] The earth and the planet and all that—I feel like we’re greatly connected to that on a very deep level.”
Jacqueline, 30
Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Buddhist)

People who feel the highest sense of connection to a higher power or to humanity at large are more likely to take community, civic, and political action.

In particular, people who feel highly connected to all of humanity, compared even to those who feel moderately connected to all of humanity, are more likely to engage in community and civic behaviors.

Importance of civic action by people with different levels of connection

Respondents who say the following actions are "very important"

Making a difference in my community

Being informed of community issues

Welcoming people who are different from me into my community

Speaking up when other people have been wronged

Helping other people in need

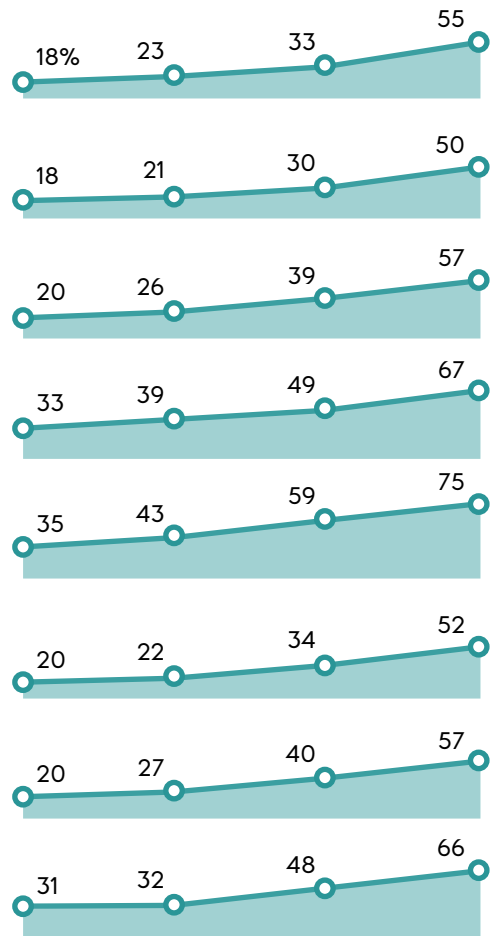
Volunteering

Supporting causes or organizations that are important to me

Contributing to the greater good in the world

To what extent do you feel connected to all of humanity?

Not at all connected Slightly connected Moderately connected Highly connected



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Participation in civic action by people with different levels of connection

Respondents who say the following actions "describe me very well"

Working with others, I make positive changes in my community.

I stay informed of events in my community.

I make an effort to attend community events.

I make an effort to know my neighbors.

I make an effort to interact with strangers.

I participate in organized volunteer opportunities.

I donate to causes or organizations that are important to me.

To what extent do you feel connected to all of humanity?

Not at all connected Slightly connected Moderately connected Highly connected



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.



The United States is not isolated from any other country on the planet. We are all one. One big family. And depending on how you think about the nature of a 'God,' you might say the size of it on planet Earth is all the cells of all the different beings on the planet. How do we plug in to be of service?"

Dennis, 71
Very spiritual / Not religious at all (Protestant)



You can't be part of the whole and look at people in the whole and are struggling and think to yourself, 'Oh, I shouldn't help them.' If you're aware of your interconnectedness, then you're aware of your responsibility to help everybody else that is connected to you."

Gwen, 29
Slightly spiritual / Not religious at all (Atheist)

Participation in political action by people with different levels of connection

Respondents who say they have done the following actions during the last 12 months

Attended a meeting to talk about political or social concerns

Telephoned, written a letter to, or visited a government official to express your views on a public issue

Given money to a candidate, campaign, or an organization concerned with a political or social issue

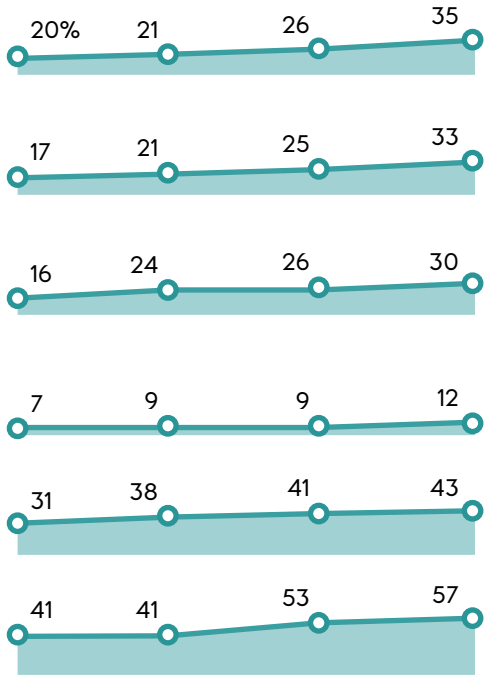
Joined in a protest march, rally, or demonstration

Signed a petition on the Internet or on paper about a political or social issue

Respondents who say they "always" vote

To what extent do you feel connected to all of humanity?

Not at all connected Slightly connected Moderately connected Highly connected



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

“

The connection with your heart and your mind and how you present yourself with those beliefs ... transcends religion. I think it's a general part of the human experience, that we're all spiritual in some way. I think that it shapes the way that you believe, the way that you present your beliefs to others, and has an impact on all political and social [action]."

Grayce, 19

Moderately spiritual / Slightly religious (Christian)

“

Voting. It feels like such a community, I mean for me that's like church. I mean what some people ... must get from church."

Sara, 52

Not spiritual at all / Not religious at all

ACCOUNTABILITY

How does a sense of accountability inform the way people connect inner spirituality and outer action?



In focus groups and interviews, many people who instinctively described that their inner spirituality informed their outer actions explained why: They felt a responsibility that came with their faith, their relationship with a higher power, or their sense of connection with humanity, to “help others.”

The survey sought to better understand accountability as a link between spirituality and civic action. It found that the more a person feels accountable to a higher power for their impact on others and the natural environment, the more likely they are to believe community and civic action is important, and engage

in community, civic, and political behaviors themselves. People who believe that their spirituality requires them to hold political leaders accountable engage in these same behaviors at higher rates as well.

Expectedly, most people who do not believe in a higher power do not feel accountable to one for their impact on others or the natural environment. However, not everyone who believes in a divine being feels highly accountable to it—and those who believe in a higher power and also feel highly accountable to it are likely to be the most civically engaged.

EXPERT INSIGHT

A virtue that drives us to action



Charlotte vanOyen Witvliet, Ph.D.

Lavern '39 and Betty DePree '41 VanKley

Professor of Psychology

Hope College

The Study of Spirituality in the U.S. is the first nationally representative study to examine a key bridge connecting spirituality, religion, and civic life: accountability.

Accountability is a common topic in conversations and news coverage about civic and political life in America. Calls for accountability in individuals and systems point to the importance of relationally responsible attitudes and actions, policies and procedures. For a democracy to work well, we look for its leaders in branches of government and its parties, its public servants and citizens to welcome their relational responsibilities with a view to their impact on other people and the world in which we live.

As a virtue, welcoming our accountability involves being both responsive and responsible to give another what is due. We can show our relational accountability both toward other people and also toward God or a higher power.

The study provides novel data on the prevalence with which people in the U.S. see themselves as accountable to a higher power for the impact they have. Findings highlight that the majority of respondents saw themselves as accountable to a higher power for their impact on other people (72%) and the natural environment (69%).

People who espoused their transcendent accountability felt guided by religion and spirituality, were involved and connected, and aspired to grow more.

“

*As a virtue,
welcoming our
accountability
involves being both
responsive and
responsible to give
another what is due.”*



Further, their transcendent accountability was evident in their civic attitudes and activities. They placed high importance on being informed, speaking up when others have been harmed, and the value of volunteering. They were also more likely to have reported attending community events, knowing their neighbors, interacting with strangers, volunteering, and donating.

Some survey respondents also sensed a spiritual summons to hold political leaders accountable (41%). They voted frequently and were politically involved in the prior year—communicating views to government officials; donating to candidates, campaigns, or organizations; joining protest marches, rallies, or demonstrations; or signing petitions.

Thus, the survey data speak to the vital role of accountability. Since the survey was conducted, we have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and anti-racism protests across the country in response to the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. Our democracy is being tested. Being answerable to God or a higher power for one's impact on others and the world, and being spiritually led to engage in accountable practices, could be key attitudes and actions that facilitate a healthier democracy.

The majority of respondents reported that they are accountable to a higher power for their impact on other people and on the natural environment.

People who identify as both spiritual and religious see themselves as especially accountable to a higher power for their impact: In focus groups and interviews, they described feeling accountable to God or a divine being, or accountable to values rooted in their religious or spiritual beliefs.

Of those who say they are not at all accountable to a higher power, a vast majority (86%) do not believe in a higher power at all.

“To what extent are you accountable to a higher power for your impact on other people?”

% summary based on all responses

Extremely accountable



Somewhat accountable



Not very accountable



Not at all accountable



“To what extent are you accountable to a higher power for your impact on the natural environment?”

% summary based on all responses

Extremely accountable



Somewhat accountable



Not very accountable



Not at all accountable



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

“

If you think that [we're here for a reason] or not, it really shapes the way you're gonna be acting because if you think that there's someone out there watching over you, watching what you're doing, and you're here to shape something bigger, you're not just gonna sit around and think that what you do doesn't matter.”

Grayce, 19

Moderately spiritual / Slightly religious (Christian)

“

You have to be ... aware of your influence on things and things aren't just happening to you. Your own ownership and accountability for your own place in the world and how you operate, and how you affect other human beings.”

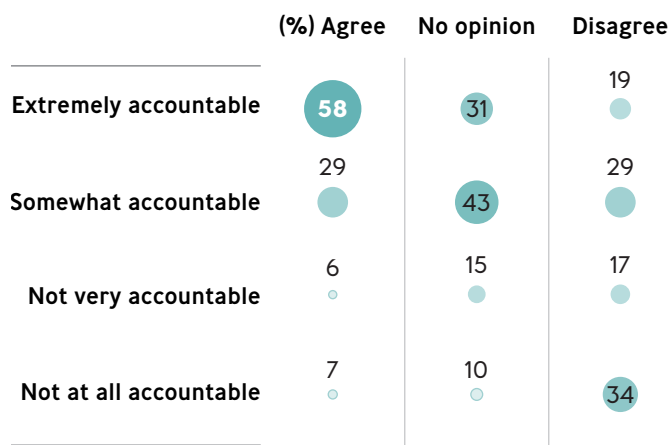
Jacqueline, 30

Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Buddhist)

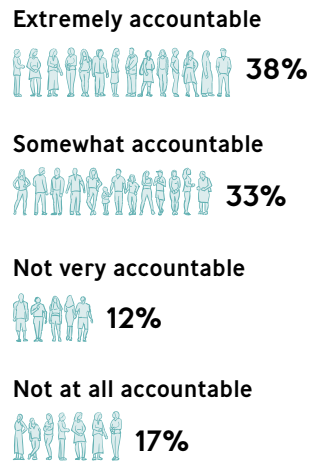
People who see themselves as extremely accountable to a higher power for their impact on other people are also more likely to say that their spirituality and their religion influences their civic engagement.

In focus groups and interviews, people shared how their faith inspired or compelled them to care for and serve others.

“To what extent are you accountable to a higher power for your impact on other people?”



% summary based on all responses



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

“*I’m a Hindu, so my faith says do as much as you can do for society. If God has given you some resources you should spend those resources as much as possible for others, help them support them; if somebody doesn’t have food if you have food give them food. It’s like karma: what you do gets back to you. It’s your act. Karma is ... a path you can follow.*”

Robin, 33
Very spiritual / Very religious (Hindu)

“*I feel an obligation. I think if I feel strongly enough about an issue ... I think sometimes people won’t get involved, and I think if I’m spiritual, I think it’s my duty to get involved. Call it a spiritual obligation—maybe an obligation out of love. I don’t know. It’s an obligation.*”

Sheryl, 57
Very spiritual / Slightly religious (Christian: Non-denominational)

Those who feel most accountable to a higher power for their impact on other people are more likely to care about making a difference in their communities.

They are more likely to believe it is very important to volunteer and help people in need, in particular.

Importance of civic action by people with different levels of accountability

Respondents who say the following actions are "very important"

Making a difference in my community

Being informed of community issues

Welcoming people who are different from me into my community

Speaking up when other people have been wronged

Helping other people in need

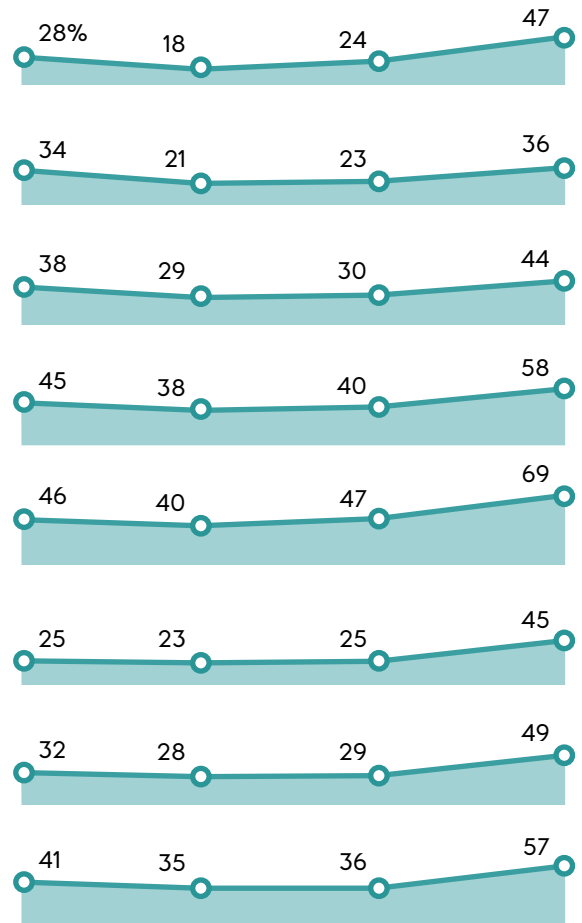
Volunteering

Supporting causes or organizations that are important to me

Contributing to the greater good in the world

To what extent are you accountable to a higher power for your impact on *other people*?

Not at all accountable Not very accountable Somewhat accountable Extremely accountable



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Those who feel most accountable to a higher power for their impact on other people are more likely to make positive changes in their community.

They are more likely to say they get to know their neighbors and strangers, and donate to causes they care about, in particular.

Participation in civic action by people with different levels of accountability

Respondents who say the following actions "describe me very well"

Working with others, I make positive changes in my community.

I stay informed of events in my community.

I make an effort to attend community events.


I make an effort to know my neighbors.

I make an effort to interact with strangers.

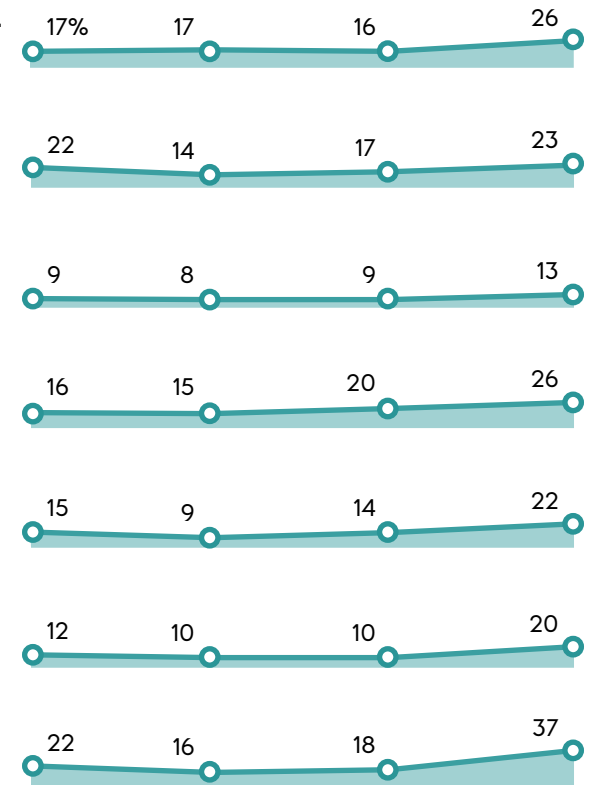
I participate in organized volunteer opportunities.

I donate to causes or organizations that are important to me.

To what extent are you accountable to a higher power for your impact on *other people*?



Not at all Not very Somewhat Extremely
accountable accountable accountable accountable

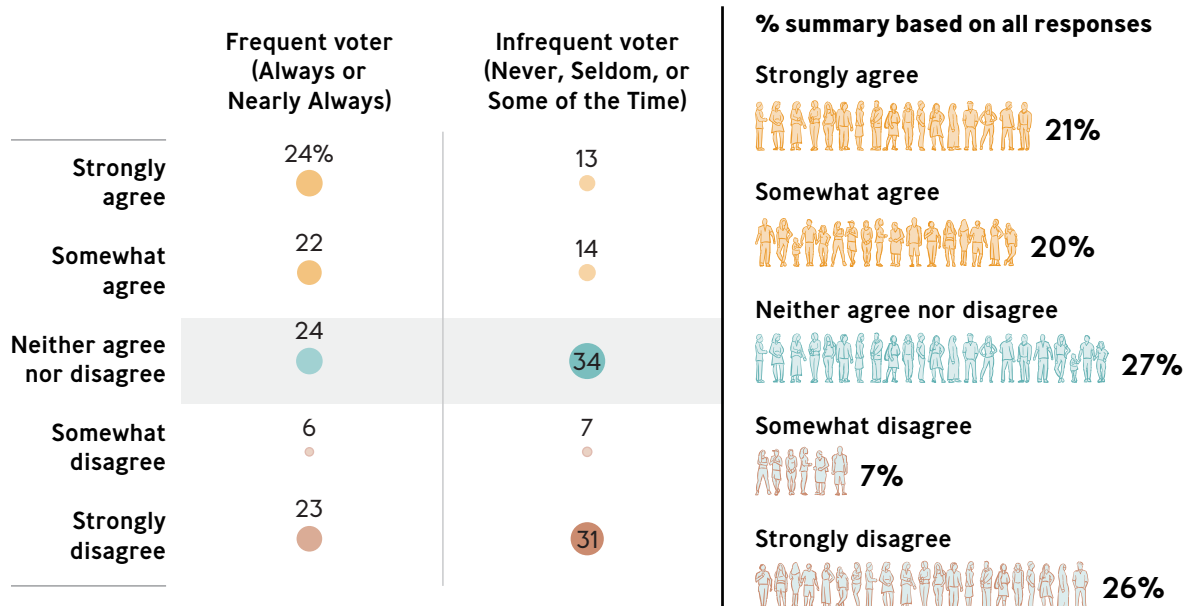


Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

2 in 5 people say their spirituality leads them to hold politicians accountable.

Adults who agreed that their spirituality leads them to hold politicians accountable were also more likely to have recently engaged in political action, and report being a frequent voter.

“My spirituality leads me to hold politicians accountable.”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

PERCEPTION OF SPIRITUALITY AND CIVIC ACTION

What do people believe about the relationship between their spirituality and the way they engage with the world?



Higher measures of spirituality are highly correlated with more active civic and political lives, but people’s perceptions about the relationship between the two are more complicated.

In conversation, we heard people affirm, reject, or grapple with how they perceived the relationship between their inner spiritual lives and outer action. We watched focus groups of six strangers debate their divergent perspectives: A few would staunchly defend how their spirituality informed their community or political engagement; a couple others would assert how the two were altogether unrelated; and the rest would share how they’d never thought about it before.

Survey findings reinforced this: Forty percent of people say that their spirituality influences their civic engagement; one in four strongly disagree.

In focus groups, several participants expressed that conversation with others opened their eyes to the connection between spirituality and civic or political life. Strong advocates often emerged in the groups: people who took up the cause of convincing others about the intrinsic relationship between spirituality and action. They gave examples of times they felt connected to a higher purpose, and urged others to draw the connection, too.

Amid the strong opinions, we also found people who had never considered the question before. One in four survey respondents had no opinion about whether their spirituality influences their civic or political views or actions. In qualitative conversations, we heard people explain it in two ways: Either they had never considered the possibility that spirituality was more than a personal concept, or they were ambivalent about whether the two should be connected.

Ambivalence was most present when people described the relationship between spirituality and voting. However, it's possible that people's responses reflect more about their view of politics than of spirituality. We heard some people describe voting in particular as a pragmatic choice based in logic or individual preference.

If those people view voting as a self-interested act, and understand spirituality as a connection to something greater than the self, then it follows that voting would not be a spiritual act. Others described the immorality of politicians or the political process. For example, Shannon, 50, conveyed her sense of disconnect between spirituality and politics when she asked:

"Does anybody know a politician that doesn't lie, that doesn't cheat, that doesn't do all of the bad things?"

If spirituality offers peace, love, and values for a majority of people (as the survey found), it would also follow that people who see politics as corrupt would not see it as spiritual.



EXPERT INSIGHT

The spiritual resources that sustain us



Omar M. McRoberts, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Sociology

The University of Chicago

We know that formal religious membership, or participation in religious organizations, has historically been an important path to civic participation. In organized religion, people commonly develop skills and acquire special kinds of knowledge that facilitate their participation in broader public life. What then happens with people who identify as “spiritual but not religious” or as religious “nones”? We must not assume that they are unengaged civically—rather, we should use research to find the ways that spirituality motivates civic engagement apart from religious affiliation.

The most interesting and surprising finding for me was that many focus group participants came into the conversation not having an understanding of the connection between spirituality and their own civic life, but formed such an understanding as a result of being in conversation with others about these things. They discovered, in dialogue, the way that their civic engagements were motivated and informed by spiritual dispositions. This illustrates that the connection between spirituality and public life is not necessarily obvious, even to people who understand themselves as both spiritually and civically involved. That connection sometimes is drawn in dialogue with others who identify the same way.

I am reminded of the role of spirituality in the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and ‘60s. The Civil Rights movement was deeply rooted in the Black churches, but the connection between spirituality and this remarkable public activism was not obvious to all participants.

“
The connection between spirituality and public life is not necessarily obvious, even to people who understand themselves as both spiritually and civically involved.”

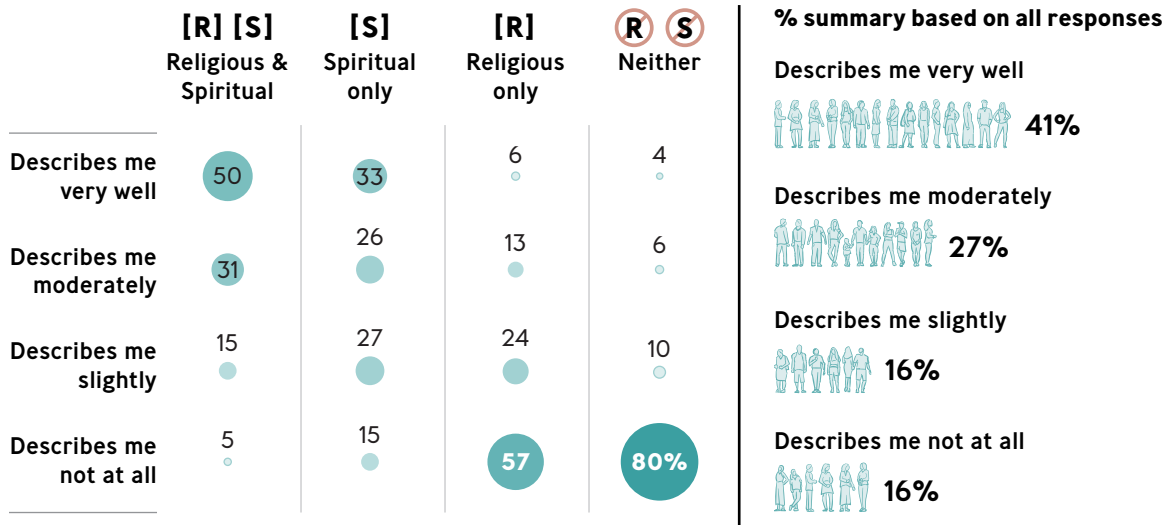
Before starting a campaign of civil disobedience, the spiritual connection was deliberately and explicitly drawn through a process that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called “purification.” In purification workshops, protesters engaged in collective soul-searching about their deepest motivations and capacities. What spiritual resources could they draw upon to build the courage to lay their bodies down and face the specter of police violence and likely incarceration? What spiritual resources could sustain their disciplined nonviolence? Purification workshops gave protesters the opportunity to make the connection between their spirituality and their public activism.



2 in 3 people believe that their spirituality guides how they act in the world.

Focus group and interview participants who identified as spiritual and religious often described the importance of aligning their faith, or belief in God or Jesus, with their actions.

“My spirituality guides how I act in the world.”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

“Spirituality isn’t just internal, but is all of my engagement in the world and trying to be like Jesus, and with Jesus, and shaped by Jesus in that.”

Elizabeth, 44
Very spiritual / Very religious (Protestant)

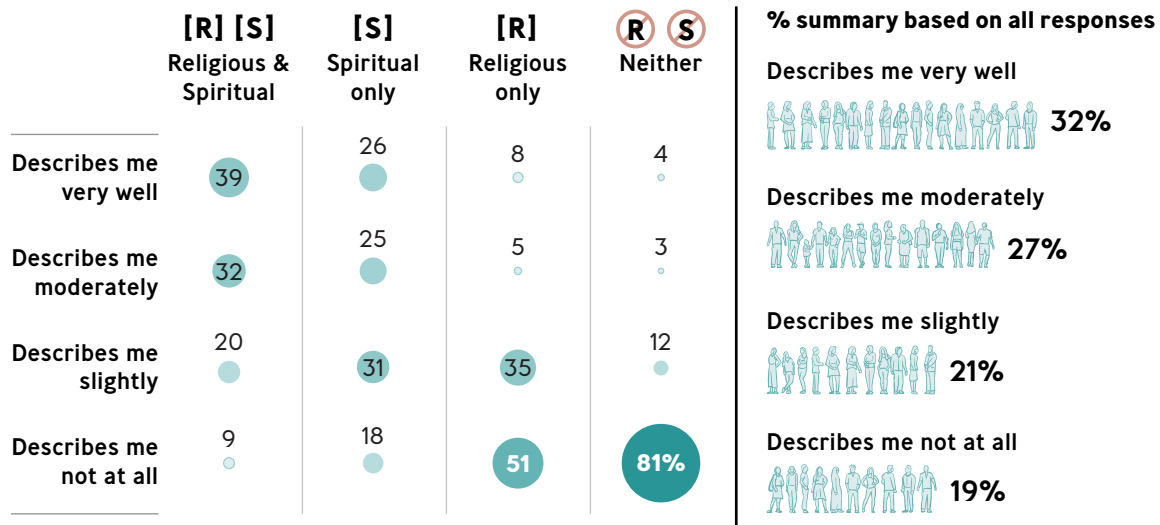
“Spirituality is something that, it’s connected with doing the right thing, or helping someone in need. [If] I see an animal that needs help that I can help, then why not help?”

Kendra, 31
Slightly spiritual / Not religious at all

3 in 5 people say that spirituality inspires them to give back to their community.

Many described a sense of moral obligation that comes with a sense of connection with their community.

“My spirituality inspires me to give back to my community.”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

“When I think of spirituality, there is a certain level of concern for your community and the people around you.”

Amanda, 21
Moderately spiritual / Not religious at all

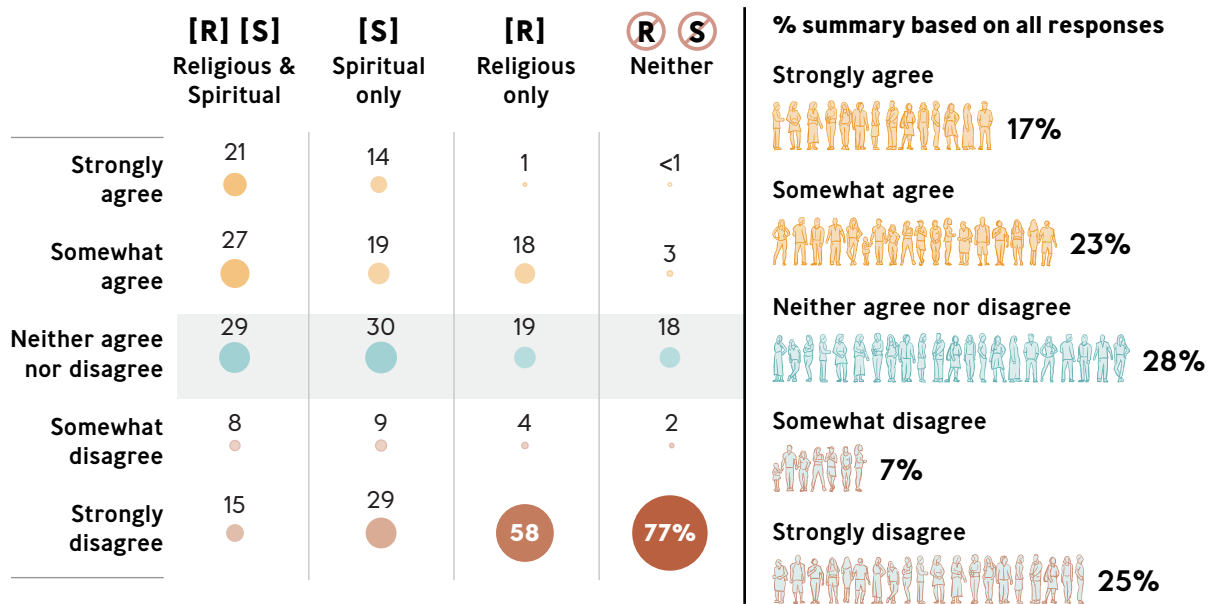
“In my church, of course, we move to do more for the community than the church. So it's like, ‘You're so spiritual, you feel a certain way, let's take that energy and push it out to the community. Let's help or build something for the community.’”

Dante, 37
Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Christian)

2 in 5 people say that their spirituality influences their civic engagement.

In conversation, several people offered examples of volunteering or other group activities during which they felt a spiritual connection with fellow volunteers who share their vision for the world.

“My spirituality influences my civic engagement (such as volunteering in my community or donating to charity).”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

“Volunteerism and spirituality go hand in hand. When you’re working toward something greater than yourself, which is normally when you’re volunteering, you’re in a spiritual place in life. Even if that wasn’t your intention when you first decided to open that door for the old lady.”

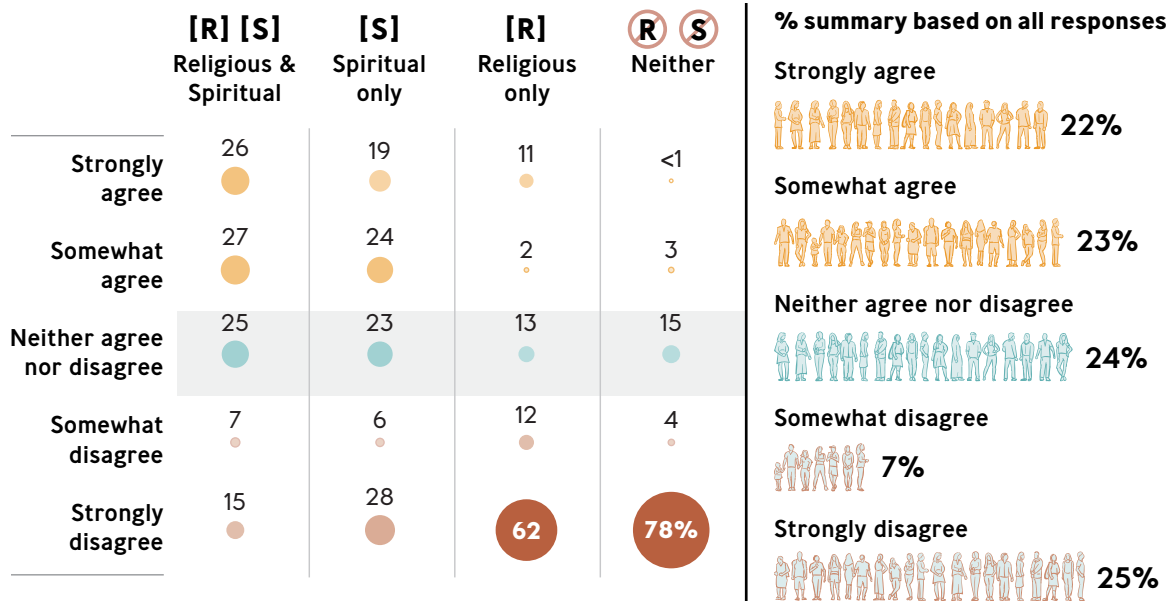
Jacqueline, 30
Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Buddhist)

“I feel connected to the people that champion the same causes as me. And we may not even have the same spiritual beliefs, but this one thing has brought us together. [...] I think that wrong things are happening to these people, and we all agree that they shouldn’t be happening, so there’s some level of spirituality there, I guess.”

Lauren, 36
Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Protestant)

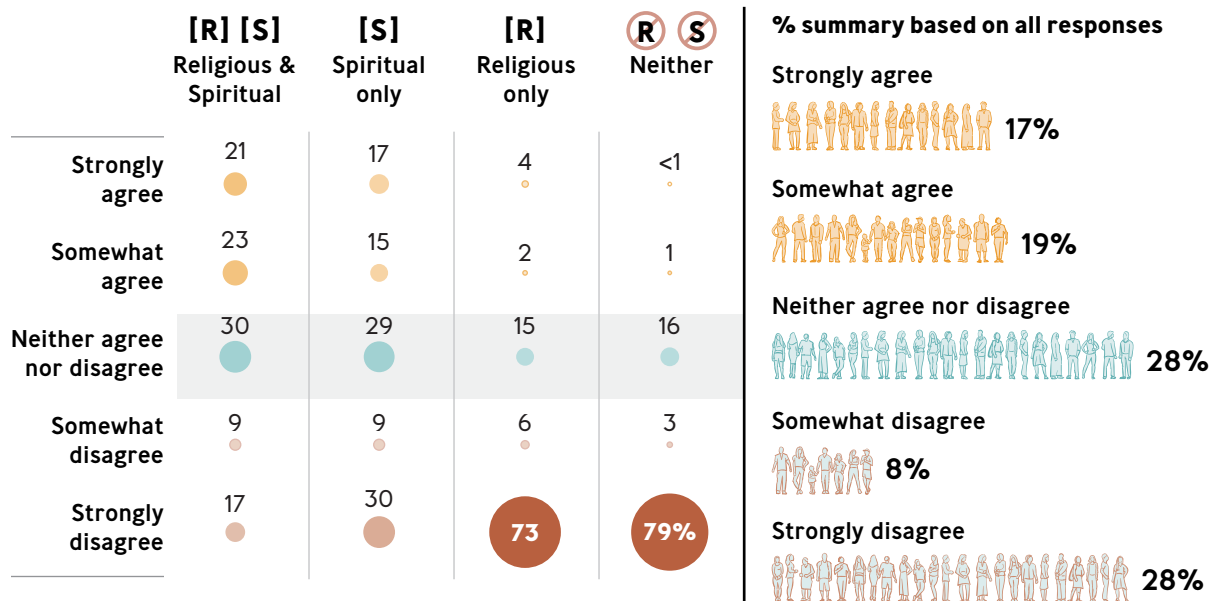
Just under half of people say that their spirituality influences their political views, and even fewer say it influences their political activities.

“My spirituality influences my political views.”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

“My spirituality influences my political activity (such as voting, volunteering for political campaigns or issues, or donating to candidates or political organizations).”



Source: 2020 Study of Spirituality in the U.S., survey conducted Jan. 16 - Feb. 3, 2020. Fetzer Institute.

Some described spirituality and politics as naturally related:

“*When I think about spirituality, of course it informs my politics. Identity is political. So, how can you separate who you are from the politics you're engaged in or you chose to vote?*”

Chenoia, 36

Very spiritual / Not religious at all

“*The choices I make as a voter, I'm going to choose to support the common good, I'm going to choose to support my values of inclusiveness, of treat[ing] others as I would want to be treated. [...] So my political views are always coming from my spiritual views and how I see the world.*”

Nancy, 54

Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Episcopalian)

Others adamantly defended the division between spirituality and politics:

“*I think it's more of an obligation as a citizen ... in the U.S. versus, a citizen of the world and the Lord and stuff like that. It's a completely different thing. You can sit there and pray all you want to and sometimes He's just not going to tell you if you should have a soda tax or not.*”

Sara Lynn, 67

Very spiritual / Very religious (Lutheran)

“*For me, voting is a selfish decision. I don't do it out of a specific obligation. I do it because I want a particular value system or belief or whatever ... I think about how it impacts me and my family more so than I think about the community as a whole.*”

Christine, 40

Not spiritual at all / Very religious (Evangelical)

Others had never considered the connection between the two:

“*Being spiritual in areas I never really thought about like getting involved with my community and doing political activity—I never even thought about that. I just thought, ‘I get to go vote’ and that’s it. [...] It’s something I can take away and maybe experience.”*

James, 43
Very spiritual / Moderately religious (Catholic)

“*Before I came in here I didn’t really think about a connection between politics and spirituality, but this was thought provoking regarding that. I think I see it now.”*

William, 69
Moderately spiritual / Not religious at all

People found a spiritual connection with others through collective civic and political experiences.

“*We went to the very first Bernie meeting after he announced his run for presidency. Honestly, I would have to say there was a component of a spiritual, collective experience in this event. I think it’s analogous to when people actually go to a good religious service. There is a similar kind of collective generation, and that is kind of the magic where you get this transpersonal substance that is bouncing around between people.”*

Dennis, 71
Very spiritual / Not religious at all

“*Like when you caucus. You know when you do that? I think then, you totally feel connected to people. Because you are being outspoken about your beliefs and everybody is there and has the same beliefs as you.”*

Anna, 48
Not spiritual at all / Not religious at all

Advocates for the connection between spirituality and political life emerged in focus group conversations.

These advocates pushed fellow focus group participants to see how spirituality might, in fact, serve as the foundation for their political beliefs or actions.



Bret: *"I tend to separate them because I think of the political parties as more organizing and certainly committing time and energy, but not always. It becomes emotional but it's not as heartfelt as other things like family."*

Anna: *"I think if you don't do it to make the world a better place, why do you do it?"*

Bret: *"A pragmatic belief that it needs to be done."*

Bret, 59

Not spiritual at all / Not religious at all

Anna, 48

Not spiritual at all / Not religious at all



Natalie: *"For me, my definition of spirituality was always very personal. So, that's why I don't think, for me, voting connects with my spirituality. Maybe just as an example is, environmentalism. I think it's really important that we vote for things that don't harm our environment anymore, because then more problems arise. So, that's a thing that can influence how people vote."*

Kendra: *"That's kind of exactly why I think the opposite. Because of spirituality and the way that I'm connected to other people ... that absolutely informs the decisions that I make, in terms of how I believe politically."*

Natalie, 21

Slightly spiritual / Not religious at all

Kendra, 21

Slightly spiritual / Not religious at all

In focus groups, conversation with others opened people's eyes to a connection between their own spirituality and the way they engage in the world.

Some people began to connect spirituality and civic or political action after listening to others describe their own connection between the two.

“ Before

I don't really tie spirituality with me going to participate in [a political rally].”

After

My spirituality has caused me to help people to register, reminding my friends we need to go out and vote on November sixth. Because it comes down to what's right and wrong, what I believe is right and it's not happening, so my spirituality maybe drives me to do that.”

Ana, 29

Moderately spiritual / Not religious at all

“ Before

When I do something, I feel like I'm motivated by passion or by belief or by commitment or opposition or something like that, but I don't necessarily frame it in a spiritual way or think about what I'm doing as filling the well that fly fishing does.”

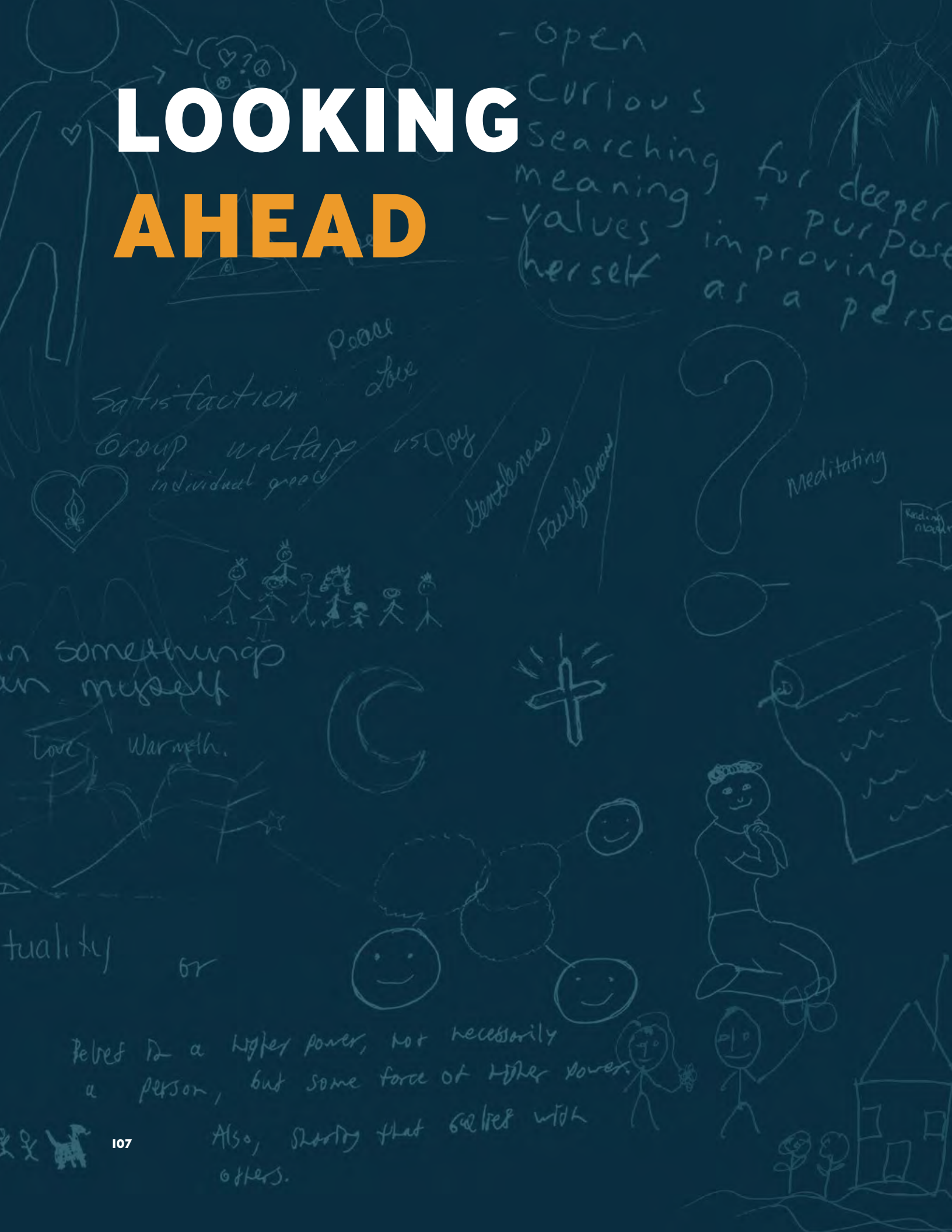
After

I think what inspires us is part of our spirituality. They're connected. [If] it's an intrinsic part of you, it's going to guide all of your actions.”

Debra, 56

Moderately spiritual / Not religious at all

LOOKING AHEAD



- Open
- Curious
- Searching meaning
- values herself
for deeper purpose
improving as a person

Satisfaction
Group welfare
Individual good
Peace Love
vs Joy

Kindness
Faithfulness

Meditating

Kindness meditation

in something
in myself

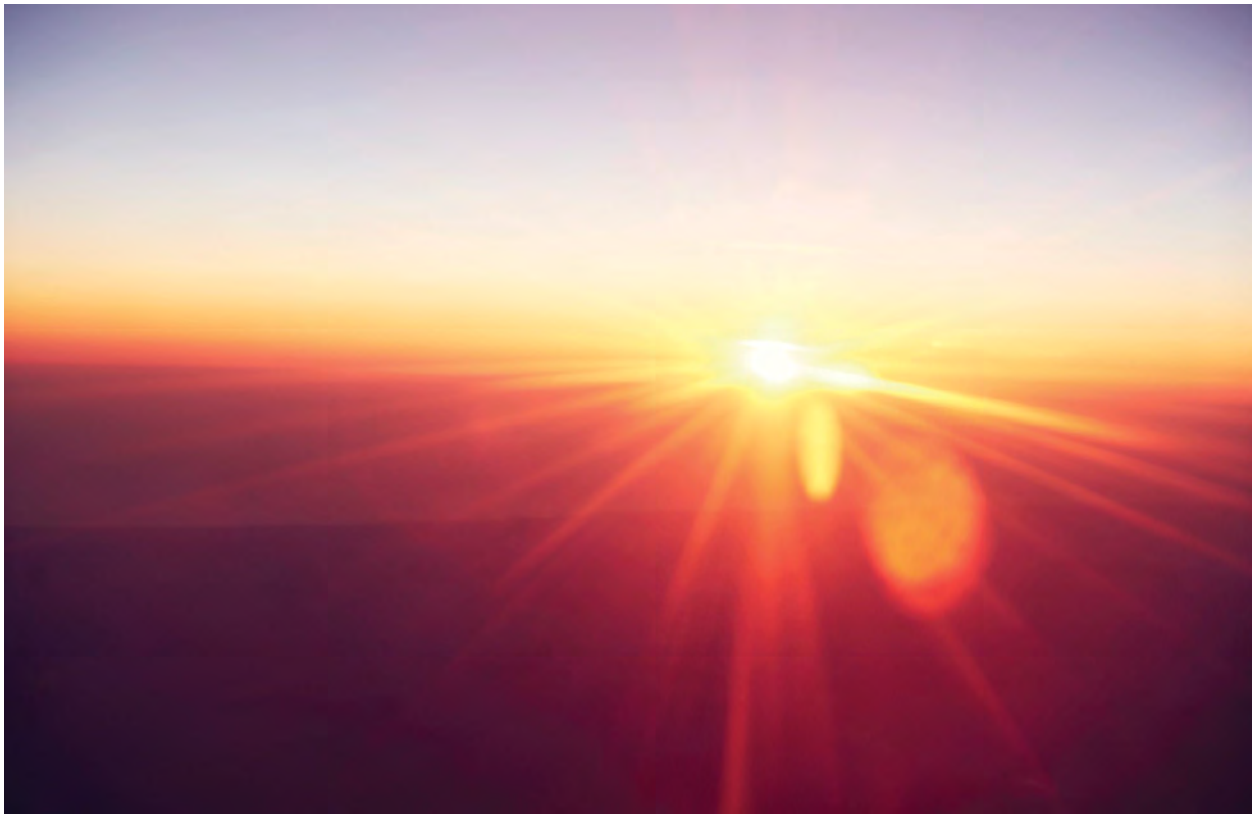
Love Warmth

Quality or

Belief in a higher power, not necessarily
a person, but some force of higher power.

Also, sharing that belief with
others.





This study captures a moment in time of spiritual and civic life. Through qualitative conversations and a national survey, we better understand the range of vocabulary, ideas, and experiences that make up spirituality for people in the U.S., and the complex relationship between people's inner spiritual lives and their outer actions.

This research is part of a robust and evolving academic, social, and political discourse about spirituality and civic life. Recognizing there is much more to learn from the study data, the Fetzer Institute is supporting additional scholarship based on the study's focus group and interview transcripts and survey data. Additional research includes:

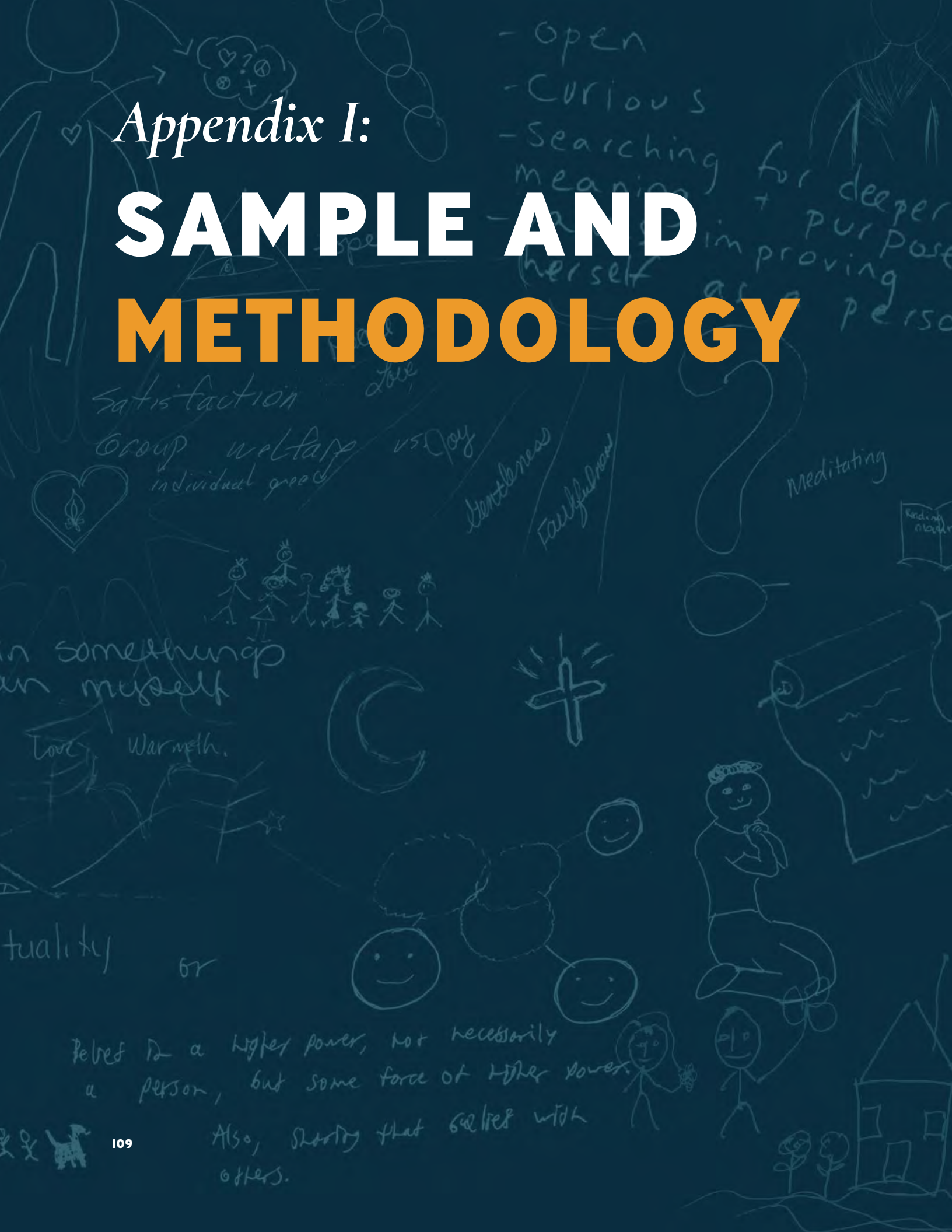
- An analysis of the ways people understand spirituality for themselves, drawing on focus group transcriptions and drawings.

- Research on the potential impact of spirituality on philanthropy, the impact of spirituality on philanthropy versus other types of civic engagement, and patterns of spirituality and spiritual practice.
- A study using time trends and cross-national comparisons with other surveys to create a general framework describing spirituality across time and across societies.
- An analysis to identify latent themes inherent in the transcribed interviews and focus group discussions.
- An examination of the intersection of spirituality and accountability, and what it means for spiritual, religious, prosocial, and political engagement.

We will share this research as it emerges, and have also made the entire survey data set available at the Association of Religion Data Archives. Find it all at www.SpiritualityStudy.org.

Appendix I:

SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY



Sampling

A general population sample of U.S. adults age 18+ was selected from NORC’s AmeriSpeak Panel for this study. In total NORC collected 3,609 survey questionnaire responses, 3,256 by web mode and 353 by phone mode, between January 16 and February 3, 2020.

The sample for a specific study is selected from the AmeriSpeak Panel using demographic characteristics based on age, race/Hispanic ethnicity, education, and gender (48 sampling strata in total) to come up with a diverse sample based proportionately on the population of different groups in the U.S.

The size of the selected sample per sampling stratum is determined by the population distribution for each stratum. In addition, sample selection takes into account expected differential survey completion rates by demographic groups so that the set of panel members with a completed interview for a study is a representative sample of the target population. If panel household has one more than one active adult panel member, only one adult in the household is eligible for selection (random within-household sampling). Panelists selected for an AmeriSpeak study earlier in the business week are not eligible for sample selection until the following business week.

Age

	Total
18-24	12%
25-34	20%
35-44	15%
45-54	16%
55-64	17%
65-74	14%
75+	7%

Education

	Total
No high school diploma or equivalent	11%
High school graduate or equivalent	28%
Some college, no degree	20%
Associate degree	8%
Bachelor’s degree	20%
Master’s degree	10%
Professional or doctorate degree	3%

Race/Ethnicity

	Total
White / Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	63%
Black / African American (non-Hispanic)	12%
Hispanic	17%
2+ (non-Hispanic)	3%
Asian (non-Hispanic)	3%
Other (non-Hispanic)	2%

Gender

	Total
Male	48%
Female	51%
Other	<1%

Region

	Total
New England	5%
Mid-Atlantic	13%
East North Central	14%
West North Central	6%
South Atlantic	20%
East South Central	6%
West South Central	12%
Mountain	8%
Pacific	16%

Political Identification

	Total
Strong Democrat	14%
Moderate Democrat	20%
Lean Democrat	13%
Don't Lean/Independent/None	17%
Lean Republican	10%
Moderate Republican	16%
Strong Republican	10%

About NORC at the University of Chicago

NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions. Since 1941, NORC has conducted groundbreaking studies, created and applied innovative methods and tools, and advanced principles of scientific integrity and collaboration. Today, government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world partner with NORC to transform increasingly complex information into useful knowledge. Visit www.norc.org for more information.

About the AmeriSpeak Panel

Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Randomly selected U.S. households are

sampled using area probability and address-based sampling, with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame. These sampled households are then contacted by U.S. mail, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings. While most AmeriSpeak households participate in surveys by web, non-internet households can participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by telephone. Households without conventional internet access but having web access via smartphones are allowed to participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by web. AmeriSpeak panelists participate in NORC studies or studies conducted by NORC on behalf of governmental agencies, academic researchers, and media and commercial organizations. For more information, email AmeriSpeak-BD@norc.org or visit AmeriSpeak.norc.org.



Appendix II:

ENDNOTES

- Open
- Curious
- Searching for deeper meaning + purpose
improving as a person

Satisfaction
Group welfare vs. Joy
Individual good

Peace
Love

Kindness
Faithfulness

Meditating

in something
in myself

Love
Warmth

quality
or

Belief in a higher power, not necessarily
a person, but some force of higher power.

Also, sharing that belief with
others.



¹ Identification for focus group and interview quotes throughout the report reflect the respondent's spiritual and religious self-identification at the time of recruitment, typically at least one week before the interview was conducted. As part of the recruiting process, respondents were asked: "To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person: Very, Moderately, Slightly, or Not Religious?" and "To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person: Very, Moderately, Slightly, or Not Spiritual?"

² GSS Data Explorer, "sprtpsrn" variable. <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/variables/2121/vshow>

³ "More Americans now say they're spiritual but not religious," Pew Research Center, September 6, 2017. www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious

⁴ Jones, Robert P., Daniel Cox, and Art Raney. "Searching for Spirituality in the U.S.: A New Look at the Spiritual but Not Religious." PRRI. 2017. www.prrri.org/research/religiosity-and-spirituality-in-america

⁵ Responses were hand-coded by NORC, and a single response could be coded to multiple themes. Does not include Don't know / NA, None / Nothing, Skipped on Web, or Refused.

⁶ Reflects phrasing from the NORC General Social Survey.

⁷ "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019. www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace

⁸ Adapted from Pew Research Center's religious self-identification question: "What is your present religion, if any? Are you Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Orthodox such as Greek or Russian Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else, or nothing in particular?" Respondents who answered by describing their religion as "Protestant" or "something else" were asked to specify further.

Response options as written in survey:

1. Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Non-denominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Reformed, Church of Christ, Jehovah's Witness* etc.)
2. Roman Catholic (Catholic)
3. Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints/LDS)
4. Orthodox (Greek, Russian, or some other orthodox church)
5. Jewish (Judaism)
6. Muslim (Islam)
7. Buddhist
8. Hindu
9. Atheist (do not believe in God)
10. Agnostic (not sure if there is a God)
11. Nothing in particular
12. Just Christian
13. Unitarian (Universalist)
14. Something else [open-end response]

*Jehovah's Witnesses were coded as Protestants following Pew Research Center's self-identification approach, understanding that they do not typically fall under this category. Twenty respondents shared Jehovah's Witness as their present religion.

⁹ Participants who selected “Protestant” were invited to specify further. Response options as written in the survey:

1. Baptist
2. Methodist
3. Non-denominational Christian
4. Lutheran
5. Presbyterian
6. Pentecostal
7. Episcopalian
8. Reformed
9. Church of Christ
10. Jehovah’s Witness
11. Other, please specify: [open-end response]

¹⁰ Survey respondent selected “Something else” in response to “What is your present religion, if any?” and provided this open-ended explanation.

¹¹ Depending on their response to the question about the relationship between spirituality and religion, survey respondents were asked, “How are religion and spirituality the same?” “How are religion and spirituality more similar than they are different?” “How are religion and spirituality more different than they are similar?” or “How are religion and spirituality entirely different?”

¹² Every instance of “higher power” in the survey was annotated with the full definition: “By higher power we mean God, gods, or some other divine source or universal energy.”

¹³ Adaptation of General Social Survey question:

“Which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about God?”

1. I don’t believe in God
2. I don’t know whether there is a God and I don’t believe there is any way to find out
3. I don’t believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind
4. I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others
5. While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God
6. I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it”

¹⁴ More information on the sixteen questions in the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale can be found at www.dsescscale.org and www.lynnunderwood.com/book. A book highlighting the use of the questions in open-ended ways for personal growth and interpersonal communication is *Spiritual Connection in Daily Life* by Lynn Underwood.

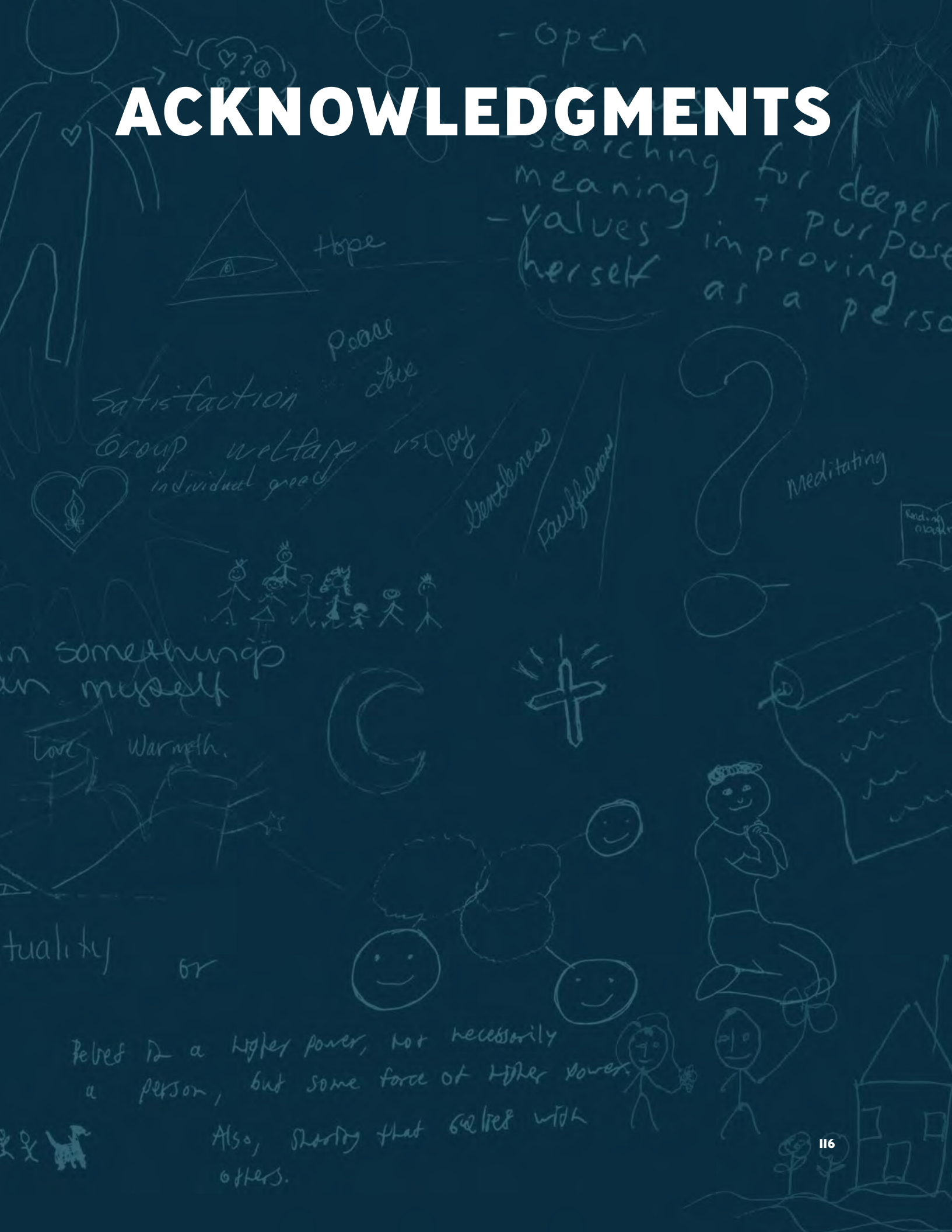
¹⁵ Throughout the report, “frequently” is inclusive of response options: (1) Many times a day, (2) every day, and (3) most days.

¹⁶ The survey question included a definition for “transcendence”: “A feeling or experience beyond the physical world.”

¹⁷ For those who identified as not spiritual at all, the survey presented the phrase: “I aspire to be a spiritual person.” For those who identified as at least slightly spiritual, the survey presented the phrase: “I aspire to be a more spiritual person.”

¹⁸ This item was taken from Lynn Underwood’s Daily Spiritual Experience Scale. www.dsescscale.org

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



- open
Searching for deeper meaning + purpose in improving as a person
- values herself

Hope

Peace
Love

Satisfaction

Group welfare vs. Joy
individual good

Meditating

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tuality or

Belief in a higher power, not necessarily a person, but some force of higher power.

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Thank you to our advisors who helped guide the study, from the core research question to the findings in this report.

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