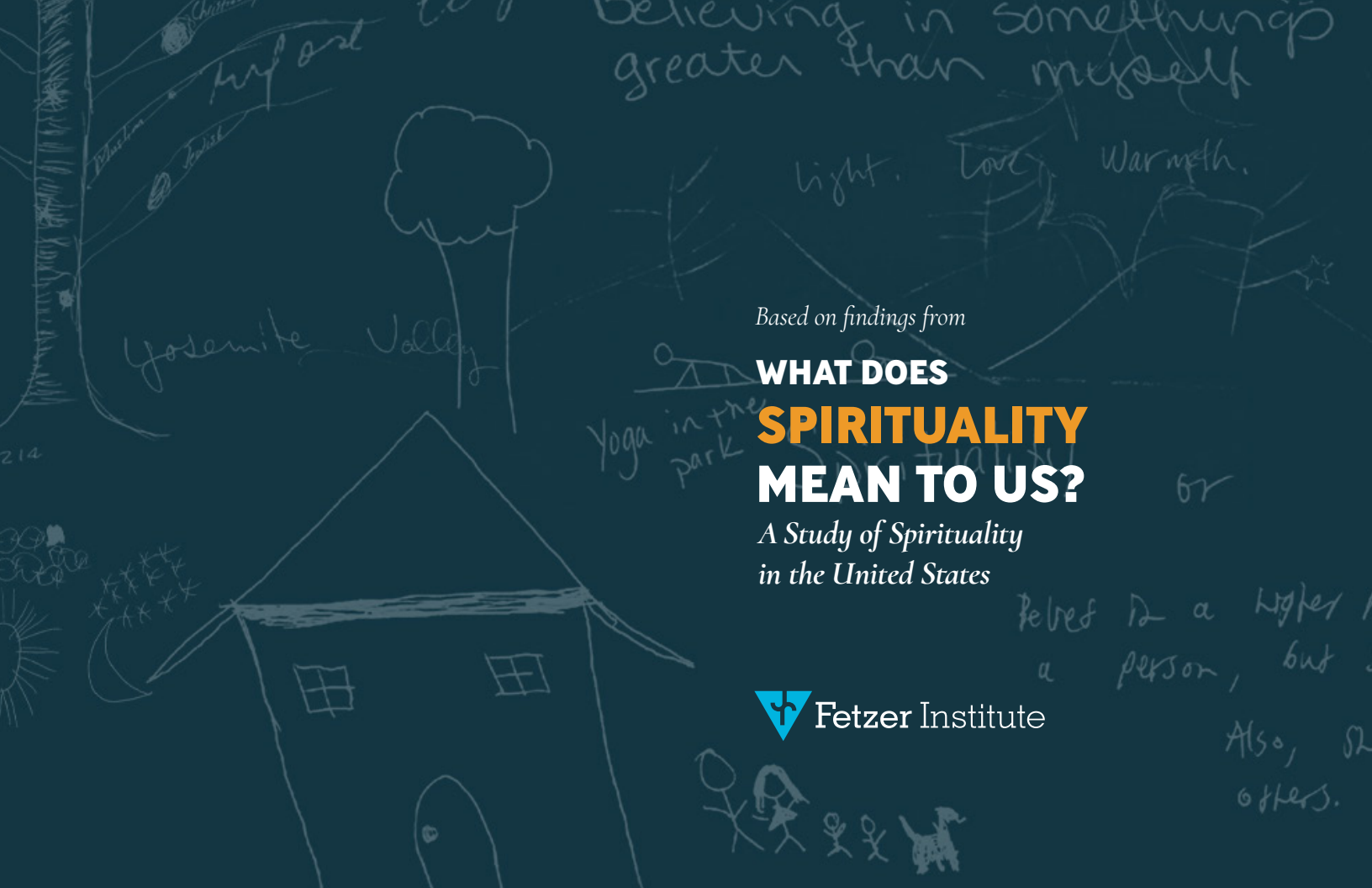


Guide to  
**EXPLORING  
SPIRITUALITY  
AND CIVIC LIFE**



*Based on findings from*

**WHAT DOES  
SPIRITUALITY  
MEAN TO US?**

*A Study of Spirituality  
in the United States*

 Fetzer Institute

## Purpose of This Guide

This guide, based on findings from the Fetzer Institute’s **“What Does Spirituality Mean to Us? A Study of Spirituality in the United States,”** is designed to help us explore what spirituality means to us and how it influences our civic lives. Released in fall 2020, the study sought to better understand what spirituality means in the United States today by reflecting how people 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.

The guide includes some key findings from the study, related activities, questions, actions, and other resources to help you explore your own spirituality and how it relates to your civic life. It was designed to encourage contemplation and conversation in online groups, in virtual or face-to-face conversations, with family and friends, or on your own.

To learn more about the Fetzer Institute and the study, we invite you to visit our website [fetzer.org](https://fetzer.org), and [SpiritualityStudy.org](https://SpiritualityStudy.org), an interactive site where you can explore the spirituality study findings and download the full report.

**Using interviews, focus group conversations, and a survey of a cross-section of the United States, the study revealed:**

- **Spirituality is a complex, diverse, and nuanced phenomenon that people of all spiritual and religious self-identifications experience.**
- **The more a person identifies as spiritual, the more likely they are to take civic and political action.**

“

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.”

– Omar M. McRoberts, PhD,  
associate professor of sociology,  
The University of Chicago

“

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.”

– Ruth Braunstein, PhD, associate professor of sociology, University of Connecticut

## Visualizing Spirituality

Our spiritual identities are extremely diverse—we experience and understand spirituality in a myriad of ways. While more than eight out of ten people in the United States consider themselves to be spiritual to some extent, we each practice and experience spirituality differently. How do you visualize or verbalize your spirituality?

**Explore:** Draw what spirituality looks like to you. If you're participating in a group and feel comfortable, take a picture of your drawing and share it, along with any description you'd like to provide. (Visit [SpiritualityStudy.org](http://SpiritualityStudy.org) to see how study participants illustrated or described what spirituality meant to them.)

**Reflect:** How does your understanding of spirituality shape how you are present in the world?

**Act:** Take one simple action this week that is informed by your spiritual beliefs, whatever they may be. For example, if you think spirituality is about love, how can you show someone love? If you think being in nature is spiritual, how can you connect more to nature?

**8 of 10**  
people in the U.S.  
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## Spirituality and Gratitude

Many people describe experiencing spirituality through regular practices of gratitude. In our study's focus groups, some described how the experience of receiving unearned blessings compelled them to shift their own lives or pass the blessings along to others. What role does gratitude play in your spiritual experience?

**Explore:** Write down five to ten things that you are grateful for.

**Reflect:** Analyze your list. Are there common threads between the things that you are grateful for? Are they material items, people, or something more emotional?

**Act:** This week, be intentional about showing gratitude for the things that you wrote on your list. Can you build these actions into a regular practice?



## Spiritual Imagination

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Nearly one out of two people in our study reported that at least once a week they regularly engaged with art (such as singing, painting, listening to music) as a spiritual activity. How does art help you experience spirituality in new and meaningful ways?

**Explore:** Choose a work of art. It can be a poem, song, photograph, painting, etc. Sit with it for five minutes or more, taking in all of its aspects.

**Reflect:** Why did you choose this piece? What memories are associated with it? How does it make you feel?

**Act:** Schedule regular times to engage with whatever form of art you find nurturing and/or time to engage in your own artistic expression. Contemplate how this regular date with creativity affects you.

### More resources:

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**The On Being Project:** [Poetry Films](#)

**The Peace Studio:** [100 Offerings of Peace](#)

**Spirituality & Practice:** [Practicing Spirituality Through Creativity E-course](#)

## Feeling Spiritual

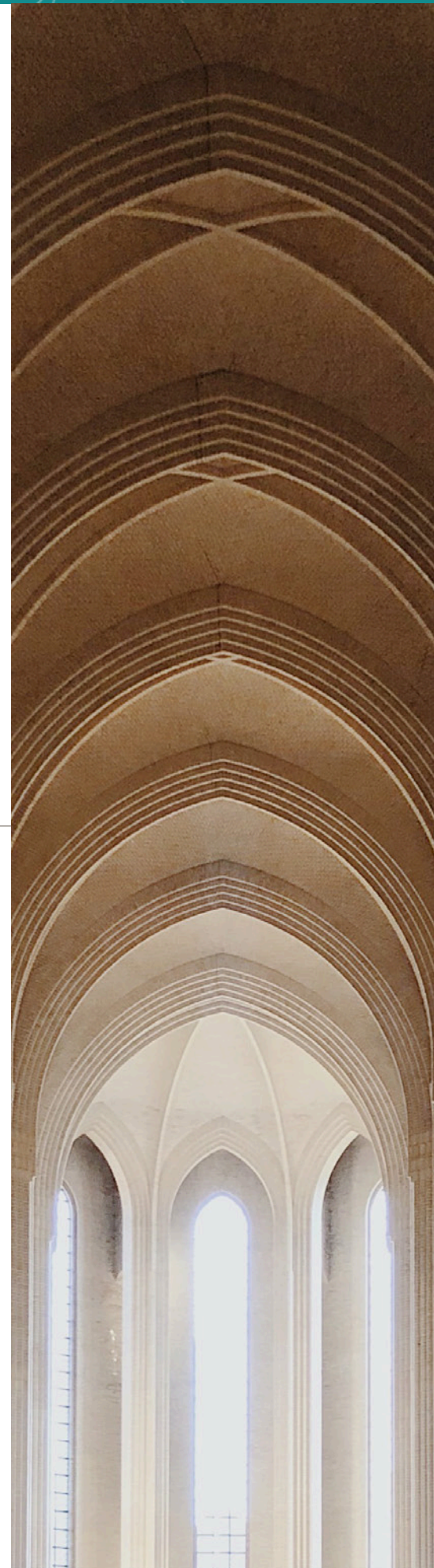
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People feel spiritual in a multitude of ways—such as feeling divine love; the presence of a higher power; a deep connection to others; awe or wonder in the natural world. What are the ways in which you feel spiritual?

**Explore:** Write down a time when you felt spiritually connected. Where were you? Who was there? What were you doing?

**Reflect:** Why does this moment stand out to you?

**Act:** Pay attention to moments—even the most fleeting ones—when you feel spiritually connected. How might you attune yourself to these moments? How might you create the conditions for more of those moments in your life?



## Seeding Peace

For many people, spirituality offers immense feelings of peace. In fact, peace was identified as the number one benefit for both spirituality and religion. Such peacefulness can ground us and remind us that we are part of something greater than ourselves. Consider the relationship between spirituality and peace and your experience with each.

**Explore:** Identify two or three images of things that bring you peace.

If you're engaging in these activities with a group, share your image(s) with others.

**Reflect:** How can you intentionally seed peace into your own life and the lives of others?

**Act:** Challenge yourself to take a few hours or a whole day this week to do something that makes you feel calm and at peace. Afterwards, write about what you felt and experienced.



“

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.”

– Pamela Ebstyn King, PhD,  
Peter L. Benson Chair of  
Applied Developmental Science,  
Thrive Center for Human Development,  
Fuller Theological Seminary

## The Roots of Unconditional Love

When focus group participants and interviewees were asked how spirituality made them feel, how it showed up in their daily lives, and why it was important to them, many people mentioned the idea of “love.” Unconditional love is powerful in both healing our relationships with ourselves and with each other. It can push us toward meaningful action that can better the world around us. What does it mean for you to love others unconditionally?

**Explore:** Make a list of the conditions you sometimes require to love others.

**Reflect:** Are there any conditions that you can give up?

**Act:** Do one simple thing this week to nurture another person's feelings of being loved unconditionally.



## Our Aspirational Identity

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Spirituality has an aspirational function for many people in the United States—it is how they would like to be known as a person and this longing motivates their decisions and behavior. By understanding how our spirituality influences who we wish to be, we can find ways to act in accordance with these values. Explore how an aspiration to be spiritual might influence the type of person you want to be.

**Explore:** Write down five words that describe your spiritual aspirations.

**Reflect:** What role does spirituality play in your growth as a person?

**Act:** Pick one word from your list of spiritual aspirations to cultivate each day.

## Conscious Connections

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A sense of connection to others, a higher power, a divine being, nature or something else can ground us, remind us of our shared humanity, and animate acts of compassion toward each other and the world around us. Consider how your sense of connection may be a fundamental part of your spiritual life.

**Explore:** On a piece of paper, draw a picture of yourself in the middle (it can be a stick figure). Name it “Me.” Now, draw a slightly larger circle around yourself. Think about all of the things or people you feel most closely connected to. Then, draw a slightly larger circle. Who or what are the connections that might be farther out?

**Reflect:** How are the elements within each circle connected with one another? What do they have in common?

**Act:** Circle five of the people or things that you said that you are connected to. Every day this week, do one thing that deepens your connection to each.



## Circles of Compassion

Many people from our study mentioned that the Golden Rule—treating others how we would like to be treated—is at the center of spirituality because it emphasizes our shared humanity. Our religion or spirituality can motivate us to widen our “circles of compassion” and engage in behaviors that are rooted in love and kindness toward those around us. How does your religion or spirituality help you express compassion?

**Explore:** Write down five compassionate acts you’ve offered, received, or witnessed.

**Reflect:** Describe what it was like for you to experience or witness a compassionate act.

**Act:** Engage in one kind or loving act each day this week (i.e., touch in with someone who is alone or may need support, pay for a beverage or meal for the person behind you).

### More resources:

[Conversations About Compassion](#)

**Spirituality & Practice:** [Compassion Practice](#)



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

– Rev. Adam Russell Taylor, executive director, Sojourners



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

– Krista Tippett, The On Being Project founder and CEO

## Accountability: Our Spiritual Obligations

In focus groups and interviews, many study participants expressed feeling responsible to act, stemming from their faith, in ways that benefited others, their relationship with a higher power, or their sense of connection with humanity. Think about how your spiritual teachings, obligations, and values (such as empathy, respect, the Golden Rule, love thy neighbor as thyself) inform your civic and political behaviors and motivate community engagement.

**Explore:** Write down one or two religious or spiritual teachings that encourage you to help or connect with others and/or cultivate your relationship with God, the divine, or a higher power.

**Reflect:** Describe instances when these teachings or obligations influenced your thoughts or behavior.

**Act:** Consider how you might expand or renew religious or spiritual obligations. Select one or two ways to practice this week.



## Spirituality and Community

The study found that 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. What motivates you to get involved in your communities?

**Explore:** Think of a time when you felt a remarkable connection to a community. What were you doing? Who was there? How did you feel? Why does this example stand out?

**Reflect:** Do you equate this to a spiritual experience? Why or why not?

**Act:** This week, find a way to get involved in a new community or deepen your involvement in a community that you're already a part of. Share with someone close to you what you did or want to do.

## Spiritual Motivation

Spirituality compels people to engage in action and activities tied to creating a better nation and world—and helps to sustain that action. In focus groups and interviews, people mentioned how their spirituality motivates them to act in service of things greater than themselves. Explore how this spiritual motivation might be working in your life.

**Explore:** Think of a time when you took action—no matter how small or large a gesture—to create a more loving world.

**Reflect:** What motivated this action? How did this make you feel? Who was with you? Do you see a connection with your spirituality here?

**Act:** This week, spend time journaling about what a more loving world looks like to you and what actions you can take to help co-create a more loving world. How might you gather others to help? How could you shift or make more space in your day-to-day life for this?

### Writing prompts:

I can create a more loving world by ...

A more loving world looks like ...







## Thank you for exploring spirituality and civic life with us!

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If you found this guide useful, we encourage you to share it with others. **The guide is free to download here.** We also invite you to write to us at [info@fetzer.org](mailto:info@fetzer.org) to let us know how you used this guide and/or if you have any feedback.

## To learn more about the Fetzer Institute and the study:

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## Acknowledgments and Background

This guide is adapted from prompts developed for Exploring Spirituality and Civic Life, a Facebook Group created in fall, 2020. Deep thanks to our friends at Hattaway Communications, especially Reina duFore and Veronica Selzler.



**HELPING BUILD  
THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION  
FOR A LOVING WORLD**