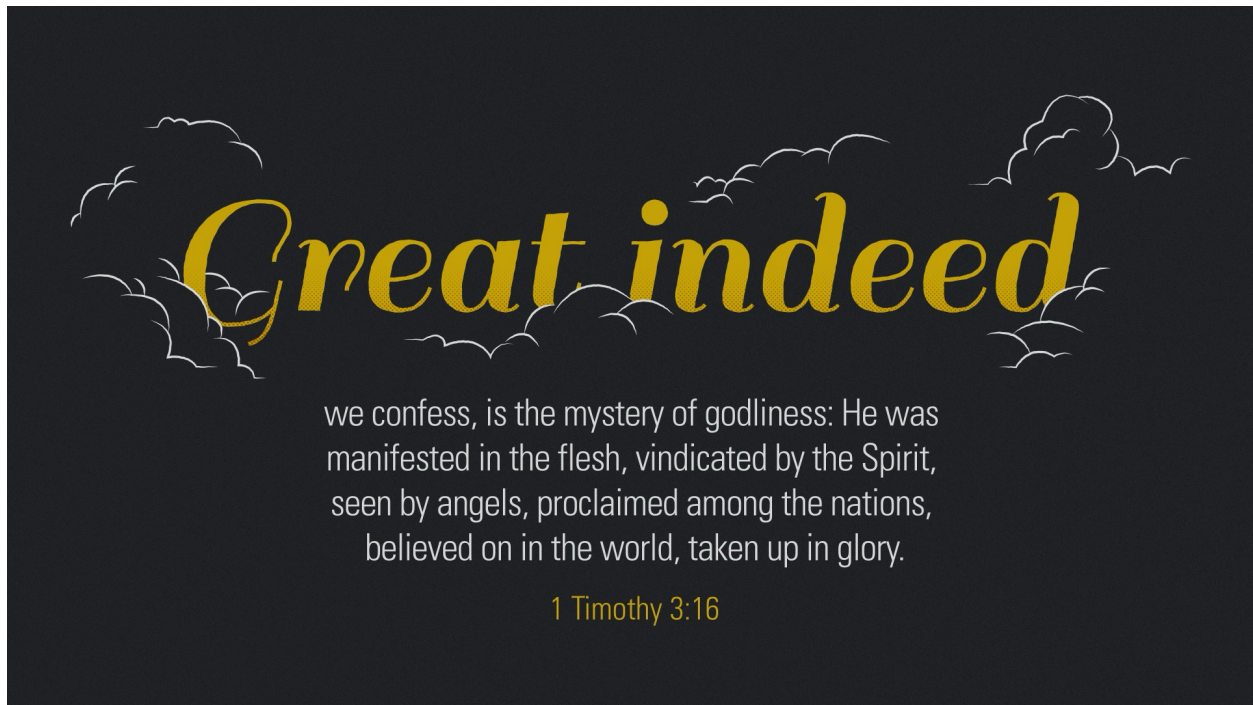


Spirituality

Brethren, consider this report of personal reflections as we prepare for 2024 in teaching and preaching God's word. The Brookfield Church of Christ has chosen as a theme for 2024, "Spiritually Mature in Truth" 1 Timothy 3:16 is the connecting text.



The Mantra for 2024 is "In Spirit and truth, we mature; in His Word, we stand secure!"

I have considered John 4:24 in trying to get us to think about what spirituality means.

John 4:24 (ESV)

24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

In considering "Spirituality" all roads end with the understanding that God is Spirit. We need to understand that spiritual things are more real than physical things. Spiritual things are eternal and can exist outside of the physical.

In my way of thinking the words spiritual and meaning are very close. A Barna Research report (See below under "The Soul's Longing). I suggest four words we should be using in our 2024 messages. Those four words are: **Inner Peace; Hope; Purpose; and Meaning**; when asking questions or making statements of your audience phrases should include the words: **Spiritual; Growing; and Open** (see below under "A Fresh Vocabulary for Spirituality").

Spirituality

Being spiritual can encompass a broad range of beliefs and practices, but a good working definition might be:

Spirituality is a broad concept that involves seeking a sense of connection to something bigger than oneself, which can involve a search for meaning in life. It is often linked with religion, but can also encompass personal growth, a quest for an understanding of the universe, and the pursuit of enlightenment or peace. Spirituality is a deeply personal matter; it can mean different things to different people. For some, it's primarily about a belief in God and active participation in organized religion. For others, it might be about non-religious experiences that help them get in touch with their spiritual selves through quiet reflection, time in nature, private prayer, yoga, or meditation.

Many people identify as spiritual but not religious, which indicates that they believe in the existence of a higher power or a life force but they don't subscribe to the beliefs or practices of organized religions. Spirituality can also involve a belief in a higher state of consciousness or an awareness that there is more to life than what is experienced through the five senses.

The key aspect of being spiritual is the pursuit of an inner path, enabling a person to discover the essence of their being or the deepest values and meanings by which they live. This can involve a variety of practices and beliefs, ranging from mindfulness and meditation to religious rituals and prayer.

Overall, spirituality is often about a quest to understand one's self and one's place in the wider universe, and can be a personal and unique journey for each individual.

OpenAI. (2023). ChatGPT [Large language model]. <https://chat.openai.com>

Spirituality

Spiritual Openness Is Widespread

Among U.S. adults, 77 percent believe in God or a higher power, 74 percent say “I would like to grow spiritually” and 44 percent say “I am more open to God today than I was before the pandemic.”

* People are created with a longing and a curiosity about God and a spiritual world. “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” Romans 1:20

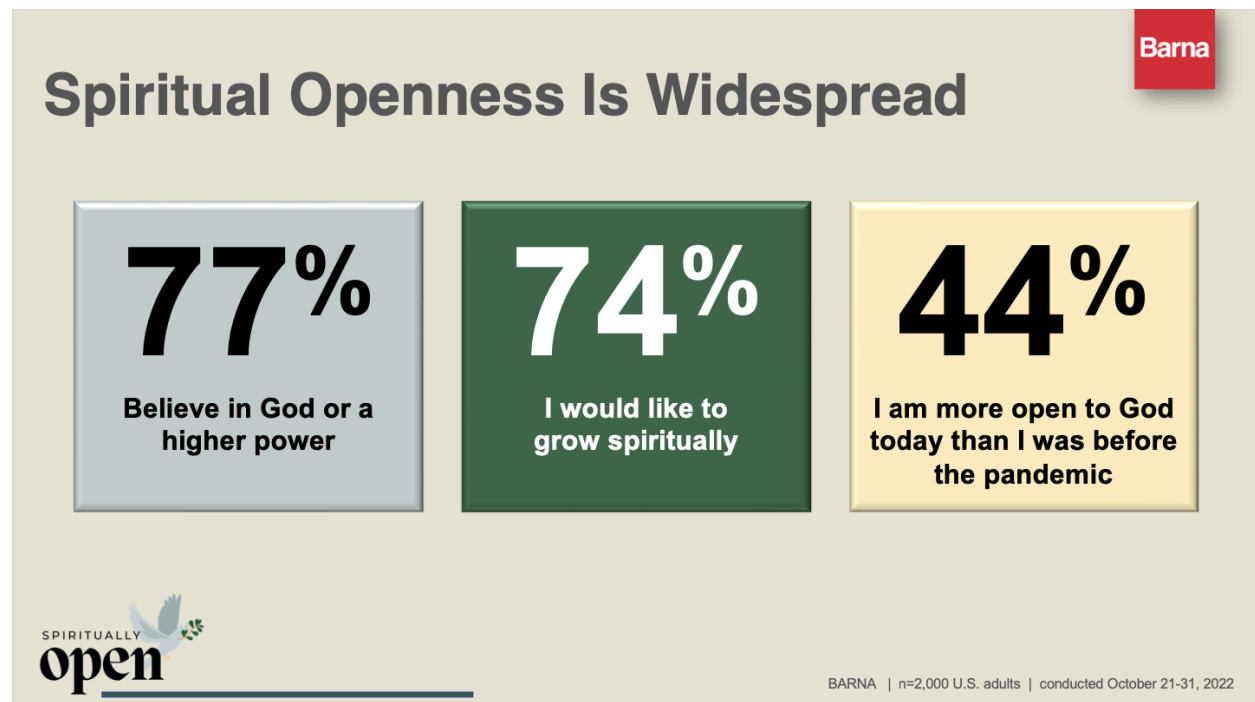
* Everyone is created by a relational God to desire a relationship with their maker. As Christians, we are not tasked with drumming up spiritual interest in people. Spiritual openness is evidence that God is at work; it always begins with God.

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.” John 6:44

* We are called to make disciples, which means we should always be on the lookout for where people are in their spiritual life. To gauge a person’s level of spiritual interest, test the soil. Where do you sense seeds can be planted? Where is their evidence that the harvest is ripe? This takes wisdom and discernment to listen and respond accordingly.

Parable of the Sower, Matthew 13

* People are searching for answers, looking for meaning and longing for hope.



Spirituality

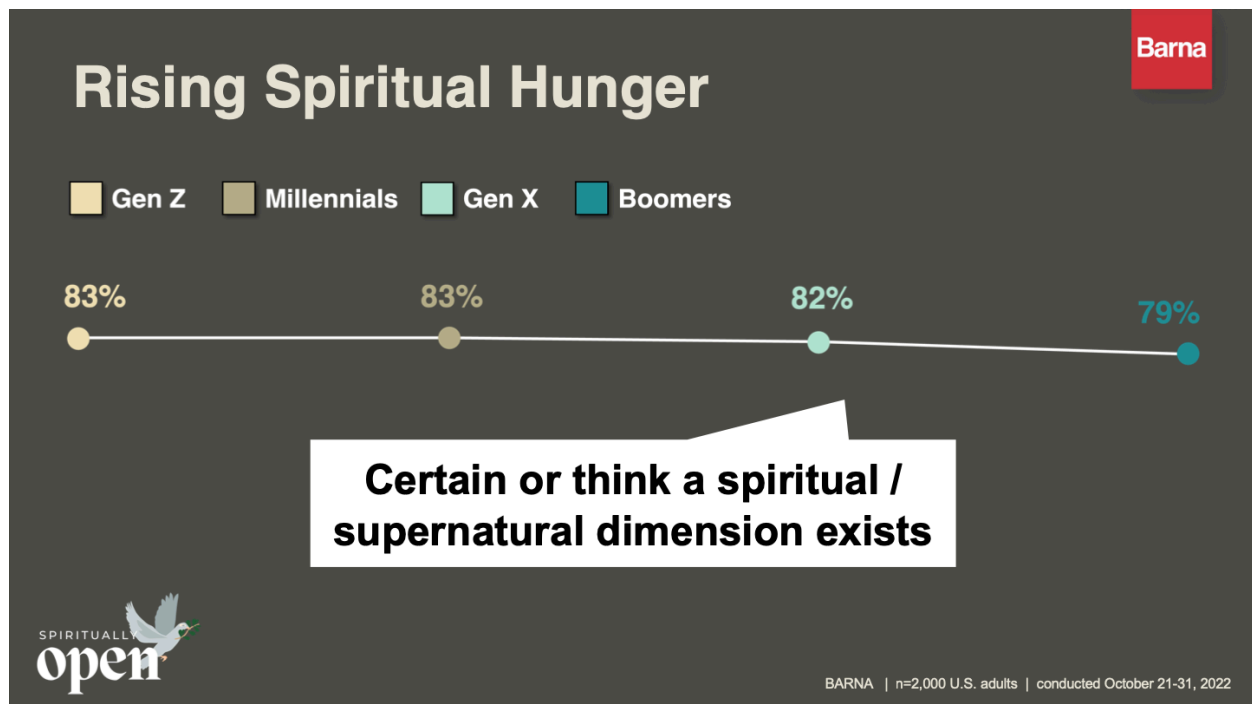
Rising Spiritual Hunger

Across generations, 83 percent of Gen Z and Millennials, 82 percent of Gen X and 79 percent of Boomers say they are certain or think a spiritual / supernatural dimension exists.

* Our hope for a reality that stretches beyond our lives can have a powerful impact on how we live within the here and now. A hope for a spiritual world that extends beyond the natural environment can be the most powerful thing in a person's life.

* The Bible acknowledges a spiritual world that stretches beyond natural dimensions (Ephesians 6:11-12). A hope that stretches into eternity cannot be crushed by present realities.

* People are looking for something more than what the world can offer.



Belief in Jesus

Among U.S. adults, 55 percent are completely certain and 25 percent are somewhat certain that Jesus was a real person. Only six percent are somewhat certain and three percent completely certain that he was not a real person. Ten percent are not sure / never thought about it.

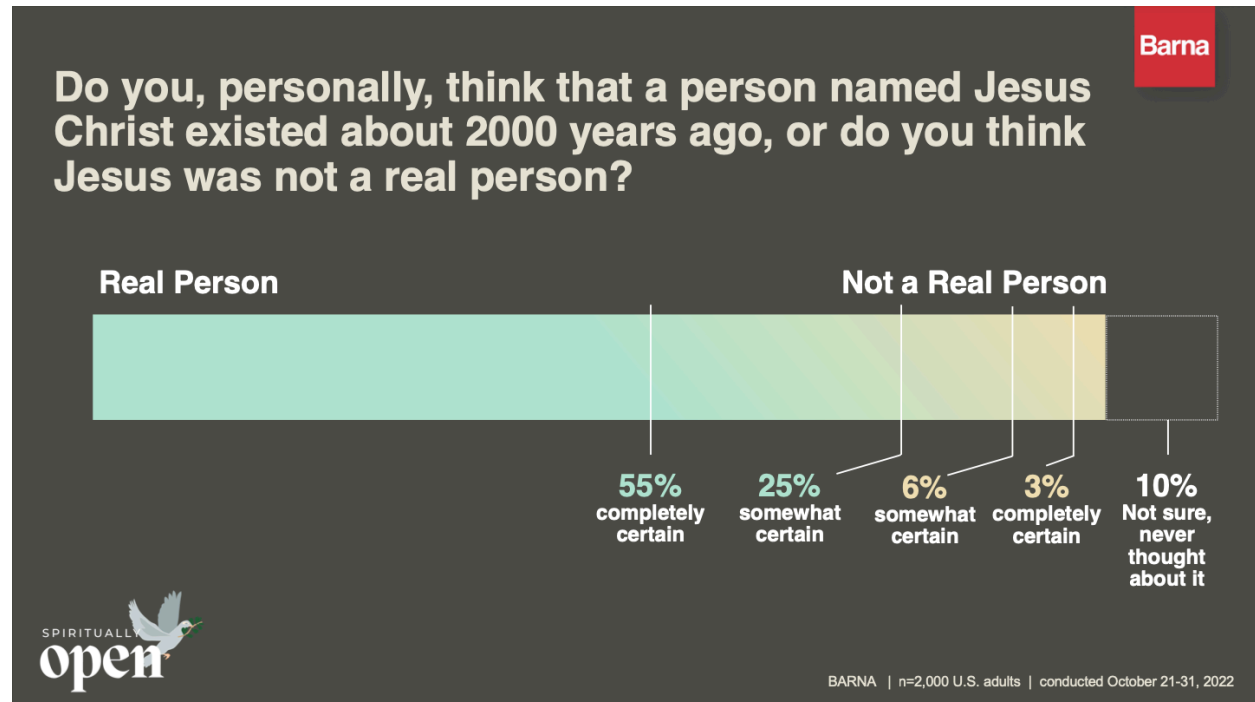
* The Gospel narratives point us to the life, leadership and values of the person of Jesus. Jesus invited people to investigate his life and his message.

* What separates Jesus from every other good teacher, leader or religious figure is his resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:14). Jesus made claims to be divine and fulfilled them by rising from the dead (John 14:16).

Spirituality

* God sent his son to come and repair the fractured spiritual relationship between humans and God. Jesus came to teach and invite reconciliation and not condemnation (John 3:16-21).

* Jesus was more than an ordinary person; he was the Son of God sent to reconcile humans with God through his life, death and resurrection.



A Fresh Vocabulary for Spirituality

Spirituality means different things to different people. Caleb, a 25-year-old financial analyst, says he thinks there is a God, or at least a divine being. “The point of a spiritual life is to figure out who or what that is,” he says. “I don't think everyone has that same drive to do that. But I think it's very important. If there is a personal God, which I think I believe there is, then why not get to know them? They're the most powerful thing in the universe. You might as well chase after that.”

Caleb's openness to pursuing God is emblematic of how Americans describe what spirituality means to them today. When we asked teens and adults in the U.S. to select words that most closely capture how they think about spirituality, they choose **spiritual**

Spirituality

Barna

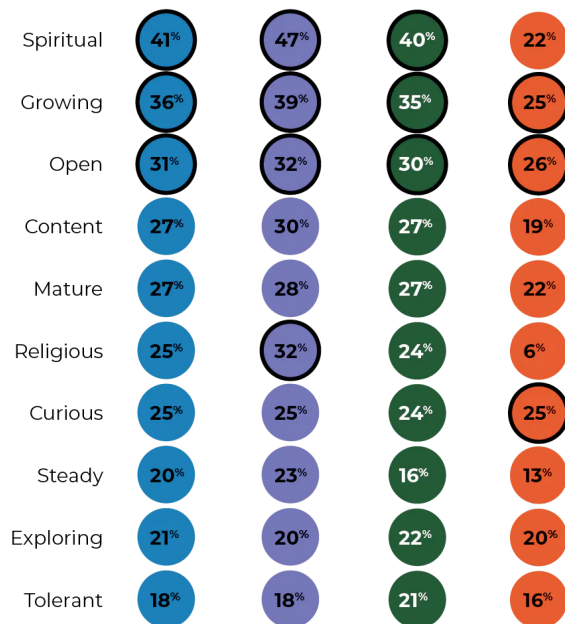
Americans' Top 10 Descriptions of Their Spirituality

The following is a list of words and phrases a person might use to describe their spirituality. If any, which would you use to describe yourself? Select up to 10.

Base: general population ages 13+

● Total ● Christian ● Other faith ● No faith

○ Denotes a top 3 response.



Source: Barna Group
n=2,005 U.S. teens and adults, December 13–22, 2022.

—of course— as well as **growing**, **open** and **content**. Even those of no faith are likely to describe their spirituality as **open** (26%).

Regardless of their religious identity, Americans gravitate toward a number of depictions of spirituality as something that is in progress—thus, the name of this series, *Spiritually Open*.

The Soul's Longings

Beyond the general concepts people use to describe what spirituality means to them, there is wider differentiation in how people describe the aim of their soul searching.

So, what are the desired paths and destinations for people on their spiritual journeys? Mainly, **hope** and **peace**. **Salvation** and **guidance** are important to people who identify as Christian.

Spirituality



The Top Things People Are Looking for Spiritually vs. Pastors' Assumptions

General population: When you consider your spiritual beliefs, what would you say you are looking for?

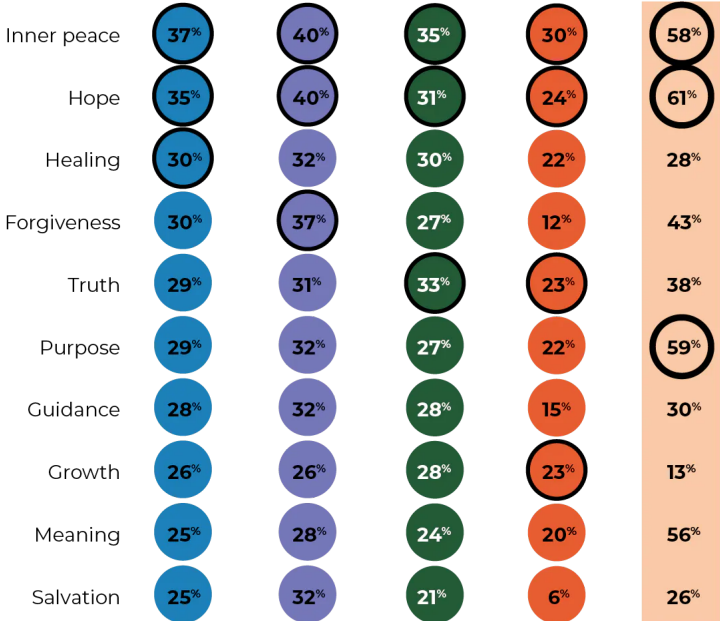
Pastors: Today, people have a diverse variety of beliefs, experiences and perspectives about spirituality.

Generally speaking, regarding spirituality, what do you believe people are looking for? Select up to 10.

Base: general population ages 13+

● All U.S. adults ● Christian ● Other faith ● No faith ● Pastors

○ Denotes a top 3 response.



Source: Barna Group
 n=511 U.S. Protestant pastors, December 13, 2022-January 3, 2023; n=2,005 U.S. teens and adults, December 13-22, 2022.

Spirituality

5 Approaches to Spirituality

Taking the top descriptors that respondents identify to express their spirituality, we created groupings of people who rank the same top words. These sets help illuminate the five most common ways people approach their spirituality.

(Note: Four out of the five groups choose **spiritual** as a key aspect of describing their spirituality. Because the word bears little significance in terms of defining each of the five groups below, we are focusing our attention on the other descriptors that more clearly define each group.)

Five Approaches to Spirituality

Barna grouped people who rank the same top words to describe their spirituality, illuminating the five most common approaches.



Nonconformists



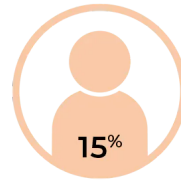
Explorers



Devout



Mature



Doubtful



% of the general population ages 13+ who fall into these groups

TOP DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR SPIRITUALITY

Neutral	Open	Spiritual	Content	Confused
Open	Growing	Religious	Mature	Unsure
Growing	Curious	Growing	Steady	Doubting
Spiritual	Exploring	Devout	Tolerant	Discouraged
None of the above	Spiritual	Certain	Spiritual	Skeptical

Source: Barna Group

n=2,005 U.S. teens and adults, December 13–22, 2022.

Respondents were asked: The following is a list of words and phrases a person might use to describe their spirituality. If any, which would you use to describe yourself? Select up to 10.