

# Spirituality is Helping Gen Z Get Through the Pandemic

But they're 'unbundling' their faith, which might confuse their faith leaders and mentors.

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**Young people who identify as very religious are faring better than their nonreligious peers, according to SpringtideResearch Institute's [State of Religion and Young People 2021](#).**

Springtide surveyed 10,274 young people ages 13-25 (Gen Z) and found that experiences of uncertainty were fairly consistent between religious and nonreligious respondents. Of those who identified as "very religious," 54% reported experiencing uncertainty before, compared to 55% of those who are "not religious at all."

While these groups may experience uncertainty at the same rates, they don't experience equally negative consequences. Of the young people who said they have experienced a challenging event in their lives that caused the feeling of being unsettled, uncomfortable, or stressed, only 14% say they are "very religious," compared to 30% who are "not religious at all." Though both groups experience uncertainty, very religious young people are not as negatively affected by it.

**Further supporting this claim, the report found that religiosity is positively correlated with flourishing.**

Across every indicator, including at work, in relationships, and when it comes to physical and mental health, very religious respondents reported that they were flourishing at higher rates than their nonreligious peers.

*"I generally feel that what I do in my life is valuable and worthwhile."*

Very Religious Not Religious

Strongly agree



The State of Religion & Young People 2021: Navigating Uncertainty  
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These higher levels of flourishing could be related to religious people's beliefs surrounding purpose and meaning, which are typically associated with [increased happiness and longevity](#).

**Young people who are very religious are more than twice as likely to say what they do in life feels valuable and worthwhile, when compared to those who are not religious at all.**

"[Faith] teaches you that no matter what happens, everything's gonna be okay, and faith itself can really pull you through," said Yadi, 20, in an interview with Springtide. "It gives us something to look forward to, a destination."

## Flourishing outside the pews

Though very religious young people are flourishing more than the nonreligious, faith leaders may not detect this. It may come as a surprise to some pastors that the majority of young people consider themselves religious (71%) or spiritual (78%). However, few find their spiritual curiosities to be satisfied by one church, tradition, or institution.

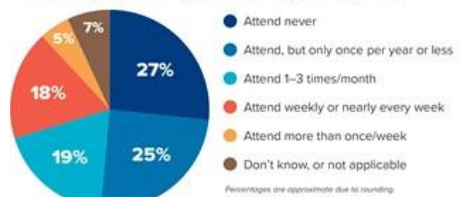
Young people who identify as religious are increasingly constructing their faith by combining elements from a variety of religious and non-religious sources, rather than receiving all these things from a single, intact system or tradition. Springtide calls this "faith unbundled."

To illustrate this, we found that young people are more likely to engage with art as a spiritual practice (53%) than prayer (45%), more likely to engage in yoga and martial arts as a spiritual practice (40%) than attend a religious group (25%), and more likely to practice being in nature (45%) or meditation (29%) as spiritual practices than study a religious text (28%).

Furthermore, less than half (40%) of very religious young people found connecting with their faith community to be helpful during challenging or uncertain times. Instead, they're more likely to turn to friends or engage in hobbies such as baking, painting, sports, or music.

**Identifying with a particular religion or spirituality doesn't automatically mean doing certain practices.**

How often do you attend religious services (i.e., at a church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other type of religious gathering place)?



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## Good Samaritans to Gen Z

Though they may not be turning to churches as often, **young people still need adults in their lives, including pastors, to guide them during challenging and uncertain times.**

**In last year's State of Religion and Young People 2020, Springtide found that as the number of trusted adults in a young people's life increased, the level of loneliness and purposeless they feel decreased. While 24% of young people with no adult mentors say they never feel their life has meaning and purpose, with just one adult mentor, this number dropped to 6%. A similar trend held true for loneliness — while 58% of those with no adult mentors say they sometimes or always have no one to talk to, this number dropped to 48% with just one adult mentor.**

When engaging with young people, pastors shouldn't try and fit them into a pre-made faith or religious system. Our data suggests this would be a huge turnoff. **Instead, the goal for faith leaders should be to stay in the conversation with young people for as long as possible and ask genuine questions with authentic curiosity. Gen Z is exploring everything, asking questions constantly, and looking for guidance.** However, they are not impressed by fancy titles and pedigrees. In an increased digitalized society that prioritizes connectivity over genuine connection, **what really impresses young people is relationship.**

Building relationships with young people is precisely the area where faith leaders can improve the most. Through the first year of the pandemic, just 10% of all young people (13% of those religiously affiliated) told Springtide that a faith leader reached out to check in with them.

Without investing time and relational capital, it is unlikely that faith leaders will gain traction with young people today. **The vast majority of young people (87%) say they trust adults who take time to foster relationships, while 81% trust adults who they believe care about them.**

Though young people may be expressing their religiosity in new and unexpected ways, their investment is still producing a return. **If faith leaders are willing to make space for spiritual conversations that go beyond a stark 'in' or 'out,' 'this' or 'that' way of compartmentalizing, they can be the trusted voices that young people need to flourish in these uncertain times.**

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