

# Faith and Belief

Te Patapātai Whakapono

**Companion Guide for Church Leaders**



# COMPANION GUIDE FOR CHURCH LEADERS

This guide was developed to help church leaders meaningfully engage with the 2023 Faith and Belief study. We asked a group of leaders to share their thoughts on what they found most significant in the report. This resource was created from their feedback. The guide summarises some key findings and offers a few questions we hope will be helpful as you consider the findings in your own context.

We encourage you to read the full Faith and Belief report (available at [faithandbeliefstudynz.org](https://faithandbeliefstudynz.org)) alongside the 2023 Church Life Survey results (available at [cls.nz.org](https://cls.nz.org)) and consider what insights they offer for leading in your context. The two studies might also serve as material for preaching, teaching, and small groups in the life of your church. The questions in this guide are often personal. This is to help readers engage with the study personally and reflect on how the findings apply to life.

The Faith and Belief study is representative of the population of Aotearoa New Zealand by age, gender, and location, with a representative sample of those from a Māori and Pacific Peoples background. If you are working with specific generations or ethnicities, you might like to look more deeply at sections of the full report that are broken down along those lines.

# OUR CHALLENGE

## Discipleship

One of the top attractors for people in Aotearoa New Zealand who are exploring faith is **seeing, first-hand, people who live out a genuine faith or spirituality**. It is worth considering that while the most common descriptors for Christians are positive (**caring, kind, and faithful**), one in five people describe the Christians they know as being **opinionated, judgemental, old-fashioned, or hypocritical**. Are we becoming more like Jesus, in our own discipleship to him?

- **What attracts me to Jesus?**
- **Am I becoming someone who reflects this to others?**
- **Would people who know me be drawn to Jesus through my life?**

The need for discipleship in our churches is urgent. While 35% of participants are committed to the religion in which they grew up, 20% who grew up with a religious faith are no longer religious. (Those of Asian ethnicity (49%) and Pacific Peoples (41%) are likelier than Māori (20%) and Pākehā (15%) to remain committed to the religion in which they were brought up.)

- **How am I encouraging others, including any children in my life, in their faith?**
- **Do I feel equipped to disciple them? Where could I turn for ideas and support?**
- **Does my church offer any discipleship resources that can help me walk with others?**



# OUR OPPORTUNITY

## Mission

### HOPES, FEARS AND LONGINGS

People in Aotearoa New Zealand are most likely to feel hopeless when they consider the **state of the planet**, **Aotearoa New Zealand society**, and their own **financial security**. Their top fears are **losing a loved one**, **not having enough money to live**, and **illness**. **Loneliness** is also a significant fear, especially among younger people, and is the third-highest fear for Gen Z.

The top longing voiced by participants is for **a hope for the future**. This is followed by the desire for **an increase in wealth and prosperity**, a **sense of security in an uncertain world**, and **genuine relationships where they feel known**.

#### What is my opportunity to offer hope to my community?

- What hope do I carry as a follower of Jesus, for our planet, society, and true security?
- How fully do I experience this hope?
- Am I able to share it in a way that makes sense to others?
- Am I involved in hope-creating activities - maybe a community clean-up, stopping to talk with people who seem lonely, offering financial/budgeting help to others in need?

#### What is my opportunity to offer a sense of peace?

- What peace do I carry with Jesus, when it comes to the death of loved ones, money and provision, illness, loneliness, and life in an uncertain world?
- Do I have words to share about this peace, in a way that might make sense to someone who does not yet know Jesus?

#### What is my opportunity to offer genuine relationships where people feel known?

- Does knowing God's goodness and experiencing relationship with Jesus empower me to be a loving presence for others?
- What opportunities are there to invite others into my life?



# OUR OPPORTUNITY

## Mission

### A SPIRITUAL OPENNESS

Experiencing a personal trauma or significant life change is the top attractor to investigating faith and spirituality, for people in Aotearoa New Zealand. The factors most likely to prompt someone to think about faith or spiritual matters are a death in the family, conversations with people (such as friends, neighbours, and colleagues), or a life crisis.

- **Have I received comfort from God during tough times in my life?**
- **Have I experienced being more open to God in times of significant change?**
- **Am I ready to share about those times in a way that might encourage someone in their faith, or in a way that someone who does not yet know Jesus might understand?**
- **Is there an opportunity in my life to be present to someone through a significant time?**

Most people in Aotearoa New Zealand (81%) resonate with a spiritual belief of some kind. 45% of people strongly or somewhat believe in a higher being or God. Over 40% believe there is life after death, and over 40% have witnessed situations that led them to believe in something beyond the material world.

- **When did I last have a conversation with someone about spiritual things? How about with someone who does not yet know Jesus?**
- **How would I answer, if one of my friends asked me what happens when we die?**
- **If a friend started to explain a spiritual experience to me, would I feel confident to engage in the conversation? Would I simply listen? Would I offer to pray with them?**
- **What would I need to feel more prepared for this kind of conversation in the future?**

# OUR OPPORTUNITY

## Mission

### THE POWER OF CONVERSATION

91% of people in Aotearoa New Zealand have heard of Jesus and know something about his life. Jesus is almost always described positively, most often as loving, caring, and kind. Nine in ten know at least one Christian. Christians, as we have noted, are most often described as caring, kind, and faithful, but can also be seen as opinionated, judgemental, or hypocritical.

It is good to be aware of these perceptions when we talk with others. A third of participants say it is conversations that prompt them to think about faith or spiritual matters—yet a large number (38%) are repelled by philosophical discussion and debating ideas, and one of the top barriers to engagement with Christianity is an unwelcome, pushy evangelism. Authentic conversations, in the context of genuine relationship, are key in drawing people toward faith.

William Wilberforce was intentional about having conversations about Jesus with his friends. Wilberforce made lists of his friends, and next to each name he wrote down subjects that could lead into a conversation about spiritual things and encourage that person toward faith.

- **Do I spend time with people who do not yet know Jesus?**
- **When did I last have a conversation with someone about him? What was it like?**
- **How could I be more intentional about speaking of Jesus with those I love?**

# OUR OPPORTUNITY

## Mission

### THE POWER OF INVITATION

Only one in three people attend a place of worship once a year or more, but one in four say they would attend a Christian church service or event if a friend or family member invited them. 24% would attend for the opportunity to help in the community (e.g., a food drive, beach clean-up, or tree planting). 68% say exploring spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, and mindfulness would attract them to investigate faith and/or spirituality further.

- **When did I last invite someone to a Christian service or event?**
- **Do I feel able to invite people who do not yet know Jesus to participate in activities that my church and I are doing to help the community? What might make this easier?**
- **Is there a time when a spiritual practice helped me through a trauma or significant life change? Is this story something I would be willing to share with a colleague or friend?**
- **Do I ever mention my spiritual practices, like prayer, in a way that creates curiosity in others? Would I invite someone who does not yet know Jesus to join me in prayer?**



# THE LOCAL CHURCH

People in Aotearoa New Zealand are more likely to describe the impact of local churches as positive rather than negative. That being said, most actually describe the impact of the churches near them as neither positive or negative, or don't know well enough to answer.

Where they are seen in our society, local churches and Christian organisations are valued most for offering financial assistance and food relief programmes, looking after people who are homeless, providing disaster relief assistance, and providing a place for the community.

- **Do I know what the perception of my church is among those in my local community? If so, is it what I would want it to be?**
- **When I think of what Jesus values, is it what our church values and is valued for?**
- **Is there an invitation here to make a positive change? How and when would we make such a change? How would we assess it?**



# PRACTICING FAITH

Almost half (49%) of people in Aotearoa New Zealand practice or identify with a religion. Christianity is the most common religious identity (39%), with others ranging between 0.2 and 3%. A further 19% hold spiritual beliefs but don't identify with a religion, while 30% don't identify with any religion or spiritual belief at all. Younger generations seem to be turning toward faith, with Gen Z being the least likely to not identify with any religion or spirituality.

Still, only 22% of participants attend a service at a place of worship at least once a month (15% weekly). 12% attend online once a month or more (8% weekly). 60% do not attend such services. Prayer, family, Facebook, and friends are the most common resources used for daily help with spirituality, followed by spiritual and/or religious texts, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Young people are driving this trend toward social media for spiritual support.

- **How should we hold the fact that far fewer people attend services of worship than identify with a religion, including Christians?**
- **Could this have anything to do with how we are practicing our faith as communities?**
- **Is there anything to learn from the insights above about how to approach communal worship, discipleship among our church whānau, and ministry to our neighbours?**

# QUESTIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

## OR GOVERNANCE:

- 1 What stands out, as I read and reflect prayerfully on this report and on the Church Life Survey 2023 findings? What questions might they raise for our community?
- 2 Should insights from this report have any impact on the shared life of our church—on hospitality, preaching, small groups, etc.?
- 3 What are the opportunities for discipleship among our people? How do we need to develop discipleship at our church?
- 4 What are our opportunities for mission? Is there anything we need to do (or stop doing) to reorient towards our community?
- 5 Do we have an appropriate level of transparency at our church? Are we up front about our vision, work, and finances? How can we create the right transparency?
- 6 If there was one thing we could do with the insights this study and the Church Life Survey findings provide, what would it be?



# SERMON AND SMALL GROUP

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

### KNOW OUR HOPE

What is Te Rongopai, the Good News—our Christian hope? What does it look like in my life, how does it speak to my everyday fears and longings, and how can I share it with others?

### WALK WITH JESUS

Who did Jesus hang out with? How did he engage with people and with his society? How can his followers in Aotearoa New Zealand today engage with our neighbours and society?

### LIGHT IT UP!

“You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). If I am a follower of Jesus, then I am on a mission. Do I know the light of Jesus in my own life? How can I let it shine out for others?

# SCRIPTURES FOR MEDITATION (NIV)

## **1 Peter 3:15-16**

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

## **Phil 4:6-7**

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

## **John 10:10**

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

## **Proverbs 13:12**

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

## **Luke 5:29-32**

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

# SCRIPTURES CONTINUED

## Matthew 6:25-33

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? . . . But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

## Jeremiah 7:7-8

“But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

## Luke 19:1-10

The story of Zacchaeus and how being seen and invited by Jesus changed his life.

## Romans 10:15

As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

## Matthew 5:14-16

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify you Father in heaven.”

## John 14:1-4

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”



# SCRIPTURES CONTINUED

## 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

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