

Faith and Belief

Te Patapātai Whakapono

**Companion Guide for
Christian Organisations**



COMPANION GUIDE FOR CHRISTIAN ORGANISATIONS

This guide was developed to help Christian organisations meaningfully engage with the 2023 Faith and Belief Study, Te Patapātai Whakapono.

We asked a group of leaders to share their thoughts on what they found most significant in the reports from the study. This resource was created from their feedback. The guide summarises some key findings and offers questions for reflection. We hope this guide will be helpful as you consider the findings in your own context.

Please note that there are two reports available from the Faith and Belief Study - one is a comprehensive report, and the other presents highlights from the study.

The Faith and Belief study as a whole 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 by demographics.

As you prayerfully read and reflect, we hope the findings will affirm the significance of your faith-led work and encourage you to continue to deepen it for the good of those you serve.

The Wilberforce Foundation Team

OUR OPPORTUNITY

MISSION

PRESENCE

One of the findings of the 2023 Faith and Belief Study is that the work of churches and Christian organisations is noticed and valued across Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly in key areas of community service. These include offering financial assistance and food relief programmes, looking after people who are homeless, providing disaster relief assistance, providing a place for community, and providing aged care facilities.

Churches and Christian organisations, then, for all our flaws, still have a reputation in our society for being present to people, particularly in their difficult times. We believe there is an invitation here. This presence to our neighbours in their practical need is an opportunity to be present in deeper ways as well. Let's consider some of the hopes, fears, and longings expressed by people in Aotearoa New Zealand and how we might meet them in those significant places.



OUR OPPORTUNITY

Mission

HOPES, FEARS, AND LONGINGS

Building strong, close relationships is a priority for people in Aotearoa New Zealand. The top areas of life satisfaction across the generations are family and social wellbeing and personal relationships. Participants feel hopeful about these areas of life. For many people, however, finding connections beyond these close relationships is more challenging. Having a sense of community is the third lowest area of life satisfaction reported by participants in this study.

The lowest areas of life satisfaction for participants are financial security (21%) and physical wellbeing (29%). In contrast to feeling hopeful about close relationships, participants are most likely to feel hopeless when they consider the state of the planet and the future of human life, Aotearoa New Zealand society, and their financial security. Their top fears are losing a loved one, not having enough money to live, illness, and crime. 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 a desire for an increase in wealth and prosperity, a sense of security in an uncertain world, and genuine relationships where they feel known.

SCRIPTURES FOR MEDITATION (NIV)

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.

1 Peter 3:15

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.

Proverbs 13:12

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

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

OUR OPPORTUNITY

Mission

WHAT IS OUR OPPORTUNITY TO OFFER HOPE TO OUR 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?
- Does our organisation address any of the hopes, fears, and longings identified in this study? Are we attentive to these areas of life in supporting our own team?
- Does an understanding of these areas help to clarify how we can support those we serve?
- How does our Christian hope breathe through our organisation—through our people, through our decisions, and through how our services are structured and presented?
- Do we have spiritual rhythms that nurture this hope in our team?
- Are there appropriate ways in which we can share this hope with those we serve?

WHAT IS OUR 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?
- How do we intentionally nurture relationships within our organisation? When people look at our team, do they see a community who depicts the love of Jesus?
- How can we go beyond practical service, to offer others the relational care and sense of community that so many in our society long for?

OUR OPPORTUNITY

Mission

A SPIRITUAL OPENNESS

Most people living 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, more than 40% have witnessed situations that led them to believe in something beyond the material world, and 27% believe there is a spiritual realm. 51% are open to changing their spiritual or religious beliefs, given the right circumstances.

Experiencing a personal trauma or significant life change is the most likely factor to attract people in Aotearoa New Zealand to further investigate faith or spirituality. The factors most likely to prompt someone to think about faith or spiritual matters include 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?**
- **Does our organisation support people through these important times in life?**
- **If so, do our services leave room for conversations about faith and spirituality?**
- **What are our roles and responsibilities when we engage in such conversations?**

OUR OPPORTUNITY

Mission

Other factors that are likely to attract people to investigate faith include exploring different spiritual practices, seeing first-hand people who live out a genuine faith or spirituality, and hearing stories of people who have changed because of their faith. The only factor tested that is more likely to repel than attract people is hearing from public figures who represent a faith or spirituality (note this does not hold for Gen Z, who are more open to influencers).

- **What implications do these findings have for our organisation and our work?**
- **Does our team pray together? How are we praying for those we serve? Is it possible and appropriate for our team to include prayer as part of our direct service to others?**
- **Will people who encounter our team see embodied, authentic Christian lives? How can we design our processes and services to encourage the expression of genuine faith and allow the lives of our team to shine?**
- **Does our organisation rely too much on the power of celebrity or of public figures?**



OUR CHALLENGE

DISCIPLESHIP

CHARACTER

Continuing with the theme of embodied, authentic spirituality, it is worth considering that while in Aotearoa New Zealand the most common descriptors for Christians are positive (caring, kind, and faithful), around one in five people describe Christians they know as being opinionated, judgemental, old-fashioned, or hypocritical. Other than general disagreement about the validity of Christian beliefs (like a belief in God or in miracles), the most regularly cited obstacles to engagement with Christianity have to do with how Christians are seen to live. Participants point to a perceived intolerance (7%), judgementalism (6%), the behaviour and morals of Christians (6%), hypocrisy (5%), and an unwelcome, pushy evangelism (5%). While more than half (57%) of people are warm toward Christianity, 13% are neutral, and 30% are cool—from having some issues with Christianity to being passionately opposed.

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 the people who know me be drawn to Jesus through my life?**
- **Is our organisation committed to nurturing team members in their life in Christ—both individually and as a community?**
- **How do we equip our people to live out their faith as they provide services to others?**
- **Is there room to include individual or shared spiritual practices in our team rhythms—practices that will help us to “be with Jesus, become like him, do as he did”? [1]**

[1] John Mark Comer, *Practicing the Way : be with Jesus, become like him, do as he did*. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2024.

OUR CHALLENGE

DISCIPLESHIP

LIGHT

One interesting critique to come through the study is a desire for the church to improve in its transparency and to be more up-front and clearer about its work, mission, and finances. This raises the question of how churches and Christian organisations can ensure they are beyond reproach and are “light” in our communities.

- **Does our organisation have an appropriate level of transparency? How can we be more up-front and clearer about our vision, work, and finances?**
- **How can we ensure our people are beyond reproach when interacting with others in the community, including those we serve?**
- **When we make mistakes, do we recognise, acknowledge, and seek to correct them?**
- **How can we help our public image to demonstrate Jesus Christ’s character and contribute positively to the image of the church, the community who carry his name?**

1 Timothy 2:1-4

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

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.

OUR CHALLENGE

DISCIPLESHIP

HOSPITALITY

Is our organisation marked by a Christian hospitality that draws people toward Jesus?

The majority (53%) of people in Aotearoa New Zealand believe acceptance is best defined as “accepting an individual without necessarily accepting their beliefs, practices, and identities”. Others feel acceptance should also extend to accepting (31%), celebrating (9%), advocating for (4%), or participating in (3%) the beliefs, practices, and identities of others.

- Can our team be confident in a faith-led approach to our work, while being sensitive to those who do not share our faith?
- How can we ensure our services are appropriately and inclusively delivered, without watering down our faith-led approach?
- How can we truly move toward others, enabling genuine relationships in which those we serve feel known and accepted?

The power of invitation is another significant finding in this study. Interestingly, a quarter of respondents would attend a Christian church service or event if a friend or family member invited them, and 24% would attend for an opportunity to help in the community (like a food drive, beach clean-up, or tree planting).

- Are there appropriate ways in which our people could invite those we serve to a Christian service or other event?
- How could we offer those we serve opportunities to help in their community?

OUR CHALLENGE

DISCIPLESHIP

READINESS

A third of participants say it is conversations that prompt them to think about faith or spiritual matters, yet many (38%) are repelled by philosophical discussion and debating ideas, and, as we have seen, one of the top barriers to engagement with Christianity is an unwelcome evangelism. Authentic conversations, in the context of real relationship, are key in drawing people toward faith. Are we inviting these conversations? Are we ready to have them?

William Wilberforce was intentional in 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.

- **When did I last have a conversation with someone about spiritual things?**
- **When did I last have a conversation with someone about Jesus? What was it like?**
- **What would I need to feel more prepared for this kind of conversation in the future?**
- **How would our team appropriately talk with others about the hope we have in Jesus?**
- **How equipped are we to do so? Do we understand the Good News? Do we know those we serve, enough to be able to communicate it as truly good news to them?**
- **How can our team prepare to give a reason for the hope that is in us?**

Acts 4:18-20

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

OUR CHALLENGE

DISCIPLESHIP

RENEWAL

We have touched on the areas of greatest hopelessness in our time and place (the state of the planet and future of human life, Aotearoa New Zealand society, and financial security) as well as the top fears, which include not having enough money to live, illness, and crime. We have seen that Christians are valued for their work in key areas of direct community service. Many of these issues also call for engagement at the level of systems and structures. Are there other ways in which the church can be present and engaged in renewing our society?

- **How attentive are we to the causes of hopelessness and fear in our society?**
- **How is our team engaging in these areas—at local, city, regional, or national levels?**
- **What tools do we already have, when it comes to seeking the transformation of unjust structures and pursuing peace? What skills would we like to develop?**
- **What might be the impact of our society seeing Christians engaged in these ways?**

It is worth noting that, while the top area of hopelessness in Aotearoa New Zealand is the state of the planet and the future of human life, one of the areas in which the work of the church is least valued is in our response to climate change. What is our invitation here?

- **How does our belief in a Creator, in Christ's lordship over the cosmos, and in our human mandate to care for creation impact our work as an organisation? How would we articulate our Christian hope as well as our responsibility in this area of life?**
- **What can our team do to press into this hope and responsibility in practical ways?**
- **What might result from our society seeing Christians lovingly engaged with creation and the future of human life and seeking the earth's renewal, for the glory of God?**

A COMMENT FROM REV DR KAREN KEMP

SENIOR COACH/LECTURER, CENTRE FOR
CHURCH LEADERSHIP

“The Faith and Belief study report paints a picture of two worlds struggling to connect across a hazy divide. The church is making genuine and well-received efforts to relieve suffering in our wider community, while a surprisingly youthful percentage express warmth toward Christianity generally and Jesus specifically, and an openness to engage. Both worlds share similar longings for a hope-filled future, and value relationships with family and friends. It seems they also share a lack of clarity around what a hope-filled future constitutes. This lack of clarity no doubt contributes to the view that Christians are lacking in transparency and congruence with their Christian values.

The challenge for the church is to reconnect with the good news of our own story and regain the congruence, transparency, and inclusive hospitality people respond to. All but one of the barriers to engagement with Christianity are symptomatic of a poorly embodied gospel. It seems people are not rejecting Jesus or Christianity, but our weak and dissonant discipleship.

The good news for the church is that 91% of respondents know at least one Christian, and a third are warm to Christianity! The challenge is that people look to their Christian relatives and friends as first points of connection, as sources of what it means to nurture their spirituality and follow Christ in Aotearoa New Zealand today. In other words, it behoves each and every one of us who say we follow Christ to nurture a clear, credible, and embodied discipleship within our own families and communities. And it behoves the church to support her members to do just that.”

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”

Philippians 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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