

CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Discernment and Blended Spirituality

How ministry teams can understand what a practice is doing, test what it asks people to trust, and respond with Christian clarity and care.

A free, research-grounded resource for ministry teams. Designed for a focused fifteen-minute staff, vestry, elder, board, ministry-team, or volunteer conversation.

04

What this names

A pattern in which Christian faith and language remain present while other spiritual practices, vocabularies, communities, and authority sources also help interpret experience and guide decisions.

What to listen for

Not only the name of a practice, but what the person believes is happening, what the practice promises, and how much spiritual authority it carries.

What this helps the team do

Keep the person visible, preserve Christian conviction, and respond to both the spiritual claim and the human need present in the conversation.

01 • THE FORMATION CHALLENGE

Christian language can remain while the authority structure changes

A ministry leader hears three sentences in one conversation:

"I prayed about it."

"Then I pulled a card."

"The reading confirmed what my intuition had already told me."

The person may still love Jesus, read Scripture, pray, and use Christian language. They may not experience what they are doing as leaving Christianity. They may understand each source as contributing something useful to one spiritual life.

What is this practice teaching the person to trust, expect, love, fear, or become?

The label matters. It just does not tell the whole story.

The ministry leader now has more than a practice to identify. They have a person to understand, a spiritual claim to test, and a relationship to steward.

A response that begins and ends with a label can miss what is happening.

Tarot

May be functioning as entertainment, ritual structure, emotional relief, guidance, or delegated authority.

Meditation

May be a quieting exercise, a Christian practice of attending to God, or participation in a different spiritual framework.

Energy language

May be metaphor, a claim about spiritual reality, a way of describing physical sensation, or vocabulary learned in an online community.

02 · NAME THE PATTERN CAREFULLY

Ask better questions without flattening the person

Blended spirituality is a pattern in which Christian beliefs or practices remain present while a person also draws on other spiritual vocabularies, methods, communities, and authority sources.

Christian discernment asks more than, "Is this practice Christian?" It also asks:

- 01 What does the person believe is happening?
- 02 What does the practice promise?
- 03 Who or what authorizes its meaning?
- 04 What happens when its guidance conflicts with Scripture or Christian community?
- 05 What is repeated participation teaching the person to trust, expect, love, fear, or become?

WHAT THIS BRIEF IS NOT

This brief is not a checklist that sorts every practice into safe or dangerous. It does not treat every use of tarot, astrology, crystals, meditation, yoga, manifestation, energy language, or witchcraft as spiritually equivalent.

It does not assign motives, diagnose anxiety or trauma, or flatten distinct religious traditions into one category.

It offers a Christian discernment posture that can listen carefully, test honestly, and remain present long enough to understand what kind of ministry response is actually needed.

These questions are not a way to avoid Christian boundaries. They help a ministry team name those boundaries precisely and serve the person faithfully.

A blended path can be self-directed without being random

The ministry task is to hear how meaning is assembled and where final authority rests.

SOURCE

What enters

Practices, language, communities, and experiences.

PROMISE

What it offers

Relief, identity, belonging, guidance, or certainty.

MEANING

How it is read

Personal experience and community help interpret it.

AUTHORITY

Who decides

The person determines what stays, what goes, and what receives weight.

03 · WHAT THE RESEARCH HELPS US SEE

Self-direction can still have an organizing principle

A blended path may look loose from the outside while still following a consistent authority pattern.

- 01** Blended spirituality can look like a loose collection of beliefs and practices. Yet the person may be making consistent decisions about what belongs in the collection, what each source contributes, and which voice receives the final word.

In one *Felt Commons™* poll, 52 of 57 respondents, or 91.2 percent, agreed that a spiritual path is something a person must find on their own. This was one question answered by a small, self-selected audience. It does not estimate what spiritual seekers generally believe, and it does not explain why any person chose a practice.

It does help a ministry team notice a larger possibility. The organizing principle may not be one shared tradition or institution. It may be the individual's continuing responsibility to decide what stays, what goes, and what feels trustworthy.

Authority Ministries® also studied 281 stored Reddit threads across 53 distinct online communities in *The Authority Loop™* and the connected *Multi-Pathway Meaning-Making Model™*. Across those defined digital conversations, people negotiated spiritual meaning through personal experience, community response, religious language, and competing authority claims.

The studies do not prove that online communities caused a person to assemble a blended spiritual path. They show environments in which practices and experiences are interpreted together.

The authority question beneath the collection

GATHER Multiple sources enter Beliefs, practices, experiences, and community readings.	INTERPRET Meaning is assigned The person decides what each source contributes.
TEST Conflict appears Sources may agree, overlap, or compete.	AUTHORIZE A final word emerges Someone or something decides what receives trust.

The ministry question: The ministry question is therefore not only, "Where did this practice come from?" It is also, "What gives this practice a place in the person's spiritual life, and who decides what authority it receives?"

04 · WHAT THE RESEARCH HELPS US SEE

Inner guidance can carry authority even when its limits are acknowledged

02 Intuition, signs, and inward experience often appear in spiritual language because they name something real to the person. The person may be trying to describe conviction, warning, recognition, desire, fear, wisdom, or an encounter they cannot easily explain. Ministry should not decide in advance what the person means.

What people affirmed

Several separate *Felt Commons™* polls show why careful questions matter. In one, 39 of 65 respondents said yes when asked whether the Holy Spirit is their intuition. In another, 26 of 55 selected "Yes, always trust it" when asked whether intuition can really be trusted.

Where limits appeared

Other questions made room for limitation. In one poll, 62 of 77 respondents selected an answer allowing intuition to be wrong at least sometimes. In another, 20 of 66 said intuition is always right, while the remaining 46 chose answers that allowed for error, uncertainty, or situational judgment.

These questions had different wording and different respondents. They cannot be combined into one psychological profile, and they do not prove that any individual contradicted themselves.

Together, they help ministry notice a tension that may arrive in the room: inward guidance can feel spiritually authoritative while the person also knows that inward guidance is not infallible.

The Christian response is not to pretend inward experience never matters. It is to refuse the idea that inward experience must authenticate itself alone.

A ministry team can ask, "How are you testing what you sensed?" That question opens a path toward Scripture, prayer, time, wisdom, fruit, trustworthy counsel, and the accountable life of the Church.

Listen for both parts of the tension: the experience feels meaningful, and the person may already know that the experience needs to be tested.

05 • WHAT THE RESEARCH HELPS US SEE

A practice label does not reveal its function or authority

03 National research helps make one distinction especially clear: using or consulting a practice does not, by itself, tell us how much spiritual authority a person gives it.

Pew Research Center reported in 2025 that 30 percent of U.S. adults consulted astrology or horoscopes, tarot cards, or a fortune teller at least once a year. Eleven percent reported consulting tarot cards at least annually. Most people who used at least one of the three said they did so mostly for fun. Few said they relied on the information for major life decisions.

That does not make every use spiritually neutral. It shows why ministry cannot infer dependence, devotion, or motive from the practice name alone.

The same care is needed with the language people use. In one *Felt Commons*™ question, 70 of 74 respondents said they could feel someone else's energy. The question did not define *energy*. In another, 42 of 51 respondents selected "Yes, energy centers" when asked whether chakras are real, while six selected "Yes, holistic health." The question did not establish what each person meant by those terms.

A team needs to know what the person is doing, what they believe is happening, and what weight the practice carries. The object or label may be the visible part of the story. The deeper formation question concerns function and authority.

Three questions a label cannot answer

MEANING	What is happening?	What does the person believe the practice or experience means?
FUNCTION	What does it provide?	Relief, identity, structure, guidance, belonging, or something else?
AUTHORITY	What receives the final word?	Can the practice be questioned, tested, limited, or refused?

Read the findings with care: These figures describe separate questions, defined digital materials, and distinct research populations. They do not create one respondent pathway, estimate every spiritual seeker, or establish that a practice caused a particular outcome.

06 • THE THEOLOGICAL LENS

Test everything without making the person disappear

THE POSTURE

"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil."

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

The sequence matters. The Church is not told to accept every spiritual claim because it feels sincere or helpful. It is not told to fear every claim before listening.

Paul gives the Church a discernment posture that resists two easy reactions. It is told to remain open to the work of the Spirit, test what is presented, hold fast to what is good, and refuse what is evil.

Test under Jesus Christ

First John places that testing under the truth of Jesus Christ: "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). The Bereans examine teaching against the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). Jesus asks what kind of foundation a life is being built upon (Matthew 7:24-27).

Keep boundaries visible

Scripture also names real boundaries. Deuteronomy 18:9-14 prohibits divination and related practices among God's people. In Acts 19:18-20, people who have come to faith openly turn from former magical practices. Those boundaries should not be hidden. Neither should they be used as permission to stop seeing the person.

Name the boundary and keep listening

Christian discernment can say, "This practice is not compatible with following Christ," while still asking what fear, longing, question, promise, or search for guidance made the practice matter. Naming the boundary and understanding the need are not competing forms of faithfulness.

Do not let confidence replace discernment

A strong feeling, an accurate-seeming pattern, a helpful result, or a sincere motive cannot authenticate its own spiritual meaning. At the same time, a ministry leader's confidence cannot replace patient listening, biblical interpretation, prayer, wisdom, or accountable relationship.

Formation remains communal

The goal is not to exchange one certainty mechanism for Christian fortune-telling. Christian formation teaches people to seek wisdom, test what they hear, wait when clarity has not come, repent when necessary, and remain in the shared life of the body of Christ.

Clarity must answer to Christ

Respect for a person does not require agreement with every account of God, spiritual power, truth, or authority. Christian conviction does require that clarity remain accountable to the character of Christ. It must not become contempt, panic, coercion, or a reason to abandon the relationship.

Clear teaching and patient accompaniment belong together. Christian ministry can name a boundary without abandoning the person whose need, question, grief, or longing remains.

07 · WHAT MINISTRY TEAMS CAN MISREAD

Do not let a label complete the ministry response

MISREAD 01

"The label tells us what is happening."

A practice name may tell the team where to begin asking questions. It does not disclose the person's motive, belief, frequency of use, or level of dependence.

Ask what the person is actually doing, what they believe is happening, who introduced the practice, and what authority it now carries. Entertainment, a tactile cue, a repeated ritual, and a source of spiritual guidance are not the same ministry situation.

MISREAD 02

"If it helps, it must be spiritually trustworthy."

Relief may be real. A practice may offer calm, language, belonging, identity, structure, or a renewed sense of agency. Function and truth are not the same question.

Ministry can recognize what the practice provides without treating usefulness as proof of spiritual trustworthiness. The team still needs to examine the practice's claims, authority, and formation.

MISREAD 03

"Once we name the boundary, the ministry work is finished."

A faithful boundary may be necessary. It does not, by itself, address the fear, grief, uncertainty, loneliness, desire for guidance, or search for belonging that made the practice matter.

Clear Christian teaching and patient accompaniment belong together. If the Church asks someone to release a practice, the ministry should also consider what faithful relationship, teaching, prayer, or embodied Christian practice can accompany what comes next.

QUESTIONS FOR THE ROOM

Keep truth, function, and formation in the same conversation

QUESTION 01

Which practice, sign, spiritual phrase, or guidance method is appearing in our ministry context, and what do we actually know about how people are using it?

QUESTION 02

What need or promise may be present, and who or what receives the final word when Scripture, intuition, experience, community, and the practice do not agree?

QUESTION 03

What fuller Christian resource, practice, or relationship could meet the human need present while remaining accountable to Christ, Scripture, and the body of Christ?

08 • USE THIS IN FIFTEEN MINUTES

Use one real situation without trying to resolve an entire spiritual path

- **READ • 2 MIN** Read **The formation challenge** and the definition of blended spirituality aloud.
- **NOTICE • 3 MIN** Read the three research observations silently. Ask each person to mark the one most recognizable in the ministry context.
- **MAP • 4 MIN** Choose one real but non-identifying ministry situation and use **Read one practice through five lenses**.
- **DISCUSS • 3 MIN** Choose one question for the room. Let each person answer briefly without requiring immediate agreement or resolution.
- **NAME • 2 MIN** Identify one Christian practice, relationship, teaching environment, boundary, or referral that the team will examine or strengthen.
- **PRAY • 1 MIN** Ask the Father for wisdom, the truth and grace of Jesus Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the team serves people navigating competing spiritual claims and practices.

09 • A PRACTICE TO CARRY FORWARD

Read one practice through five lenses

Choose one practice, spiritual phrase, sign-reading habit, or guidance method that the team is encountering. Do not identify a person in a way that compromises confidentiality.

1. **Person:** What do we know about the person's story, relationships, questions, and present circumstances? What have we not yet heard?
2. **Practice:** What are they actually doing? How often? What do they believe is happening when they do it?
3. **Promise:** What does the practice appear to offer: relief, identity, guidance, protection, belonging, structure, certainty, agency, or something else?
4. **Authority:** Who or what receives the final word when the sources disagree? Can the practice's meaning or guidance be questioned, tested, or refused?
5. **Formation:** What is repeated participation teaching the person to trust, expect, love, fear, or become?

Now name one response that keeps love, truth, function, and formation in the same conversation.

The response may include clearer teaching, patient listening, Scripture, prayer, a trustworthy relationship, an embodied Christian practice, a qualified referral, or a boundary. Do not try to resolve an entire spiritual path in one meeting.

10 • TEAM DISCERNMENT WORKSHEET

Leave with one faithful response the team can carry

Choose one real but non-identifying situation. Record what the team knows, what it still needs to hear, and one next step that can be revisited.

Person and practice

What do we know about the story? What is the person actually doing, and what do they believe is happening?

Promise and need

What relief, identity, guidance, protection, belonging, structure, certainty, or agency does the practice appear to offer?

Authority and testing

What receives the final word when sources disagree? How can the claim be tested through Scripture, prayer, wisdom, fruit, time, and Christian community?

Formation and response

What is being rehearsed? What teaching, relationship, Christian practice, referral, or boundary could accompany the person faithfully?

One response we will strengthen before the next conversation

Owner and review date:

11 • CONTINUE EXPLORING

Stay with the formation challenge

READ 01

01

Which Spiritual Practices Are Your People Choosing, and Why It Is Not Random

READ 02

02

When Your Gut Becomes Your God

READ 03

03

When Your People Are Building Their Own Spiritual Path

READ 04

04

When Tarot Becomes Your Prayer Life

RESEARCH NOTE

This brief draws on Athority Ministries® research including 281 stored Reddit threads across 53 distinct online communities and separate own-audience poll questions from *The Felt Commons*™. The poll results describe responses to the individual questions cited. They do not represent the wider public, follow one group of respondents through a shared pathway, or establish what any individual believes.

The brief also engages [Pew Research Center's national research on astrology, tarot cards, and fortune tellers](#). Measured findings are distinguished from ministry and theological interpretation.

PREPARED AND SHARED BY

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