

Intrinsic Spirituality as a Predictor of Quiet Ego Characteristics:

A Pilot Study Toward Veteran Transition Research

Shawn R. Frost, M.B.A.

School of Psychology, Liberty University

Final Research Project PSYC515

December 1, 2025

Author Note

Shawn Robert Frost

I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Shawn Robert Frost.

Email: SRFrost@Liberty.edu (772) 584-1454

Abstract

This pilot study explored whether intrinsic spirituality predicts quiet ego characteristics to inform a larger dissertation project on biopsychosocial support for veterans that includes a spiritually-grounded component for veterans experiencing moral injury. Twenty adults completed the Intrinsic Spirituality Scale and the Quiet Ego Scale through an anonymous online survey. Recruitment and data collection were restricted to minimal-risk procedures required by ethical standards for educational research, and the study complied fully with those guidelines. Simple linear regression using SPSS indicated that intrinsic spirituality did not predict quiet ego scores in either the full sample or after the removal of one extreme outlier. The Intrinsic Spirituality Scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, while the Quiet Ego Scale is not suitable for subsequent studies and support shifting future work toward meaning-based measures such as the Meaning in Life Questionnaire. Findings will guide the development of spiritually-informed interventions for veterans transitioning into careers in education.

Keywords: Intrinsic spirituality; quiet ego; moral injury; institutional betrayal; spiritual assessment; veteran transition; meaning in life

Introduction

Each year, over 200,000 individuals transition from the United States military to civilian life, and many experience moral conflict, difficulty finding meaning, and a loss of purpose after leaving the structured environment found in the armed forces (Currier, Foster, & Isaak, 2019). Research indicates that these struggles may present as symptoms of posttraumatic stress, depression, as well as suicidal ideation and risk (Koenig, Youssef, & Pearce, 2019). Recent studies suggest that spirituality may serve as a critical protective factor by facilitating posttraumatic growth, reconciling moral injury, and regaining coherence in veteran populations (Pearce, Haynes, Rivera, and Koenig, 2018).

Moral injury manifests when actions or experiences violate a military service member's deeply held moral values, resulting in spiritual distress, guilt, and shame (Drescher et al., 2011). Recovering from moral injury requires more than psychological treatment; it demands spiritual restoration through relational repair, self and other forgiveness, and renewal of purpose.

Promising findings by Currier et al. (2024) indicate that spiritually integrated, peer-led

interventions can promote spiritual healing and moral coherence among veterans. These findings highlight the importance of understanding research constructs that represent spiritual motivation and self-transcendence.

The Intrinsic Spirituality Scale (ISS) (Hodge, 2003) assesses spirituality or a relationship with God, or the Divine Transcendent, as a personal motivating force. It captures how deeply spirituality impacts a person's growth, life decisions, and purpose. With consistently high internal reliability ($\alpha \approx .94-.96$), the ISS provides a stable measure for studying spirituality across diverse populations, including our population of interest. For veterans, high intrinsic spirituality may reflect deeper meaning-making engagement and moral repair, making it a valuable variable for predicting outcomes in spiritual growth interventions.

Conversely, the Quiet Ego Scale (QES) (Wayment, Bauer, & Sylaska, 2015) measures self-transcendence through qualities such as mindfulness, empathy, perspective taking, and personal growth seeking and attainment. Theoretically, these traits may be linked to spiritual maturity and relational repair which are both essential to moral recovery. However, prior research has shown that variability in QES reliability, especially for inclusive identity subscale ($\alpha = .66$), raising questions about its stability across populations (Leary, Tipsord, & Tate, 2008). In the present pilot study, the total QES demonstrated low internal consistency ($\alpha = .388$), while subscales such as Detached Awareness ($\alpha \approx .747$), Perspective Taking ($\alpha = .709$), and Growth ($\alpha = .705$) were acceptable. This suggests the ISS, given its superior reliability ($\alpha \approx .96$), may better serve as the predictor variable in exploring intervention efficacy in relationships with veterans' self-transcendent characteristics and moral harm recovery.

The current study aims to examine whether intrinsic spirituality predicts quiet ego characteristics among adults. Although future research will incorporate the Meaning in Life

Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006) to measure purpose and coherence more precisely, the present phase focuses on validating the relationship between the ISS and QES. It is predicted that higher scores on the Intrinsic Spirituality Scale will predict higher Quiet Ego subscale scores, indicating that deeper spiritual motivation is associated with greater mindfulness, perspective taking, empathy, and growth- oriented identity. Preliminary findings indicated strong internal consistency for the Intrinsic Spirituality Scale but variable reliability across Quiet Ego subscales. Before applying these measures to veteran populations in future research, it is necessary to assess their psychometric reliability and relational patterns in a small pilot sample. While it may not appear in a scientific publication, this prediction aligns with the biblical promise, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26, New International Version). Simply put, the closer one’s walk with Jesus becomes, the more the fruits of the Spirit are present in veterans and healing of their moral harm and replace it with purpose.

Methods

Participants

The sample consisted of 20 adult participants (10 male, 10 female) recruited through convenience sampling from the researcher’s personal network, including friends, family, and members of a men’s discipleship group. All participants were over 18 years old and fluent in English. Recruitment was limited to acquaintances in compliance with institutional ethical guidelines for educational research. While the majority invited were veterans or spouses of veterans, recruitment was not formally validated for veteran status; thus, this sample is treated as a non-veteran pilot group. To preserve anonymity in accordance with the educational purpose of

this study, no additional demographic data were collected. Data were collected anonymously using Google Forms.

Materials

A single survey instrument consisting of the original questions and scoring of the ISS and QES re-numbered from 1-20 (Appendix).

Intrinsic Spirituality Scale (ISS).

The ISS (Hodge, 2003) is an 11-point scaled instrument (0-10) consisting of six sentence-completion tasks that assess the centrality of spirituality in the lives of participants. Respondents rate each item on a scale of 0 (not at all true) to 10 (completely true), with higher scores indicating greater spiritual salience. In this sample, the ISS demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .975$).

Quiet Ego Scale (QES).

The QES (Wayment et al., 2015) is a 14-item scale designed to assess the presence of a quiet ego, which included aspects of compassion, humility, perspective-taking, and mindfulness. Participants respond to each item using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Five items are reverse-scored. Subscale scores were computed for the four theorized domains: Detached Awareness (items 2, 6, 10 – all reverse scored), Inclusive Identity (items 3, 7, 12), Perspective Taking (items 4, 8, 11*), and Growth (items 1, 5, 9, 13, 14*).

Procedure:

Participants were invited to complete an anonymous online survey via email, social media, SMS text message, and small group chat. After consenting to participate, they completed the sole demographic item (biological sex), followed by the ISS and QES. The survey took

approximately 10 minutes to complete. Responses were collected anonymously, and no personal identifying information was requested.

Analysis

The predictor variable was Intrinsic Spirituality, operationalized as the mean ISS score (0-10). The outcome variables were the QES subscale Means (1-5). Higher scores reflected greater spirituality or quiet ego characteristics. Analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 30. Cronbach's Alpha was conducted to assess reliability the full QES demonstrated poor internal consistency ($\alpha = .388$), so subscales were calculated and the subscale reliabilities ranged from acceptable to poor: Detached Awareness ($\alpha = .747$), Perspective Taking ($\alpha = .709$), Growth ($\alpha = .705$) and Inclusive Identity ($\alpha = .455$).

Cronbach's alphas were calculated for ISS and each subscale of QES, as well as QES total score. To maintain a model commensurate in scale with the assignment a decision was taken to use QES Total, instead of the more internally consistent QES subscales, and adhere to the approved research proposal. To test the predictive hypothesis, simple linear regression analyses were performed with ISS Mean as the independent variable and each QES total as a dependent variable. Statistical significance was evaluated at an alpha level of .05.

Results

The hypothesis that Intrinsic Spirituality Scale (ISS) mean scores would predict Quiet Ego Scale (QES) Total scores was tested using simple linear regression. The initial analysis with the full sample indicated that ISS did not significantly predict QES Total, $F(1, 18) = 0.19, p = .666$ (Figure 2). One participant recorded an ISS mean score of less than 1, indicating extremely low intrinsic spirituality. This value was treated as an outlier because it was 3 SD from the mean and deemed not to reflect meaningful engagement with the construct measured by the ISS. After removing this outlier, the regression analysis again demonstrated that ISS did not significantly

predict QES Total scores, $F(1, 17) = 0.97, p = .338$, accounting for 5.4% of the variance in QES scores ($R^2 = .054$) (Table 1). The regression equation for the trimmed model was $\hat{Y} = 48.49 + 0.66(\text{ISS Mean})$. The non-standardized regression coefficient for ISS was also not significant, $B = 0.66$, standard error = 0.67, standardized coefficient (beta) = 0.23, and t value = 0.99. These results indicate that intrinsic spirituality did not predict quiet ego characteristics in either analysis. A scatterplot with a fitted regression line illustrates the weak relationship between ISS mean and QES Total Scores (Figure 1).

Table 1.

ANOVA^a

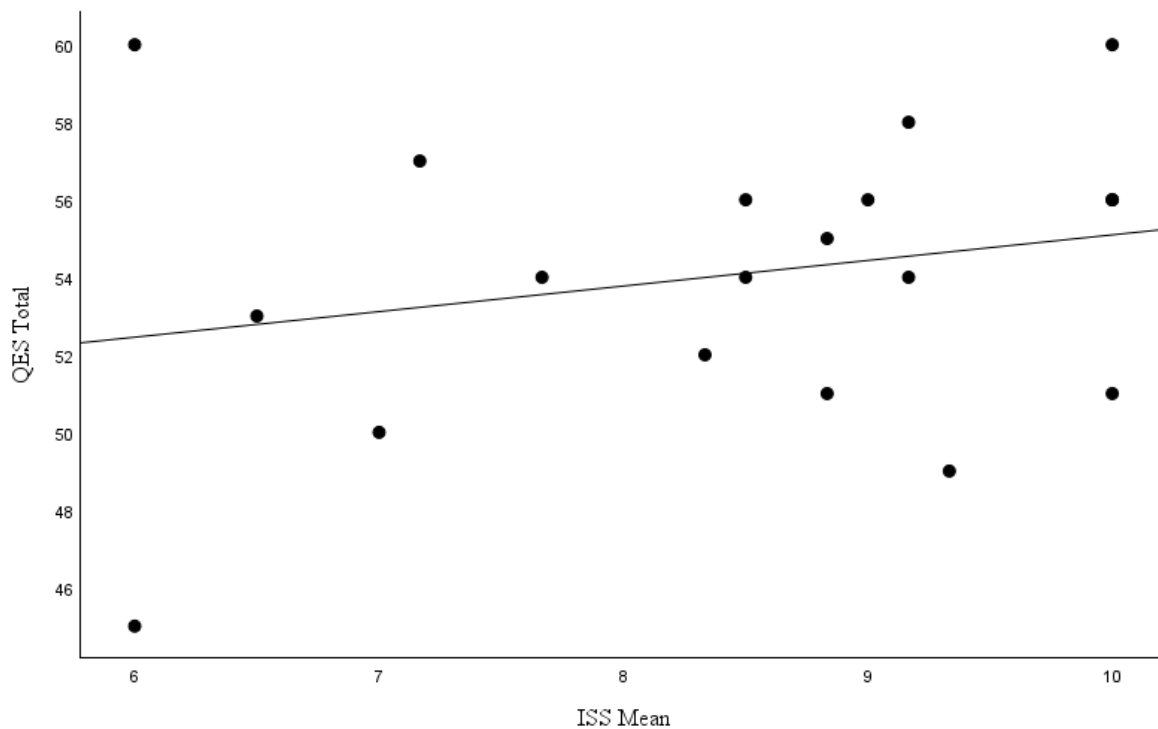
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14.023	1	14.023	.973	.338 ^b
	Residual	244.924	17	14.407		
	Total	258.947	18			

a. Dependent Variable: QES Total

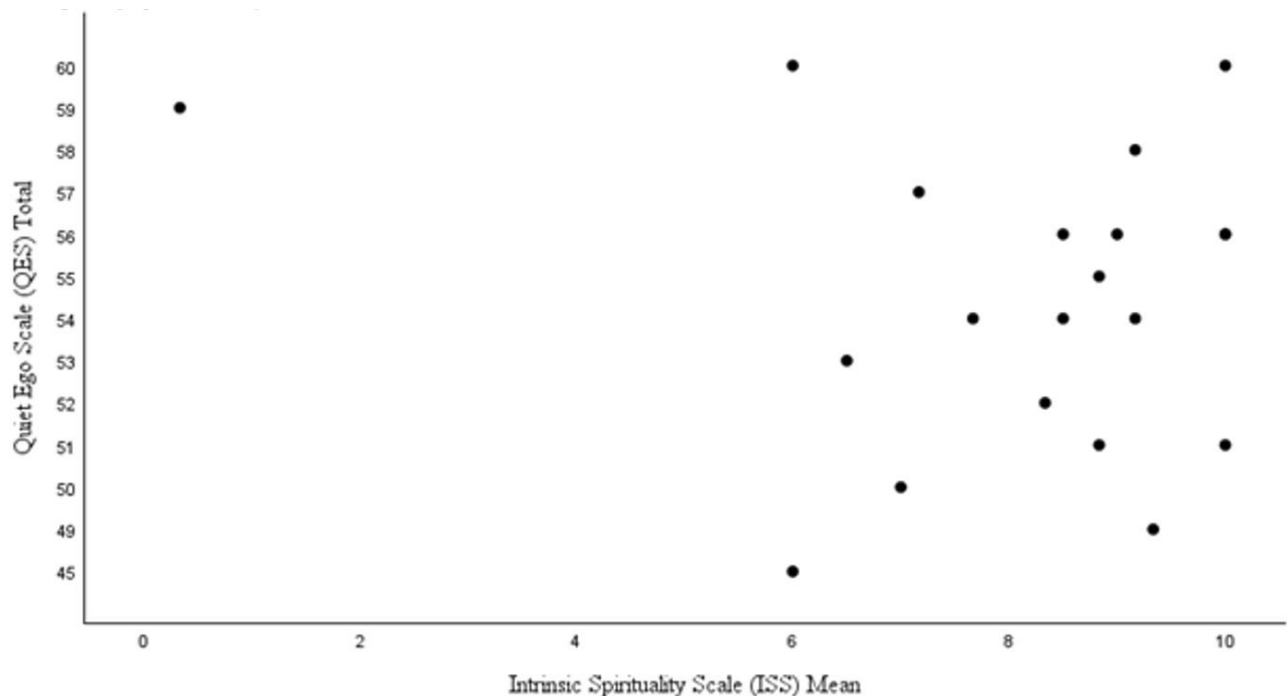
b. Predictors: (Constant), ISS Mean

Figure 1

Scatterplot of Quiet Ego Scale Total Score and Intrinsic Spirituality Scale Mean Score



Note: QES Total represents summed scores on the Quiet Ego Scale. ISS Mean represents the average score on the Intrinsic Spirituality Scale. The line reflects the fitted simple linear regression of QES Total on ISS Mean. Findings were non-significant ($p = .338$).

Figure 2.*Scatterplot of QES Total by ISS Mean*

Note: QES Total represents summed scores on the Quiet Ego Scale. ISS Mean represents the average score on the Intrinsic Spirituality Scale. This figure displays the full dataset ($N = 20$) and includes the outlier with an extremely low ISS Mean score ($p = .666$).

Discussion

The purpose of this pilot study was to examine whether an individual's relationship with God and the transcendent, or intrinsic spirituality, measured by the Intrinsic Spirituality Scale, would predict quiet ego characteristics, measured by the Quiet Ego Scale. This investigation serves as a preliminary inquiry for a larger dissertation project centered on spiritually informed interventions and support programs for veterans transitioning into second careers in education. The regression analyses did not support the hypothesis, and therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Intrinsic spirituality did not significantly predict the quiet ego characteristics either before or after removing an outlier with an extremely low spirituality score. These findings

suggest the Quiet Ego Scale may not be measuring the aspects of spirituality relevant to this population or this research question.

A major factor influencing the results was the reliability of measures. The Intrinsic Spirituality Scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the present sample, with a strong Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .93$) after removal of the outlier case. This replicates previous work validating the ISS as a reliable measure of spiritual motivation (Hodge, 2003). The Quiet Ego Scale, in contrast, showed poor internal consistency when used as a total score. Individual subscales showed greater consistency, but the decision was taken to move forward with the proposed method of investigating the predictive value of the ISS in QES total scores. The Cronbach's alpha for total QES was very low ($\alpha = .38$), with especially inconsistent response patterns in items related to the inclusive identity subscale. This replicates prior critiques noting that the quiet ego construct, while possessing face validity, does not always demonstrate strong reliability across samples because the subscale facets do not consistently function as a unidimensional trait (Leary, Tipsord, & Tate, 2008; Wayment, Bauer, & Sylaska, 2015). Given this lack of consistency, the Quiet Ego Scale does not appear to be a suitable as a primary dependent measure for the proposed dissertation.

Present findings fit within the broader literature on moral harm, spirituality, and post-traumatic growth. Research on moral injury has consistently shown that disruptions in meaning, spiritual separation, and struggles with moral identity are central indicators of veterans' distress (Currier, Foster, & Isaak, 2019; Drescher et al., 2011). Reviews of spiritually related trauma recovery further indicate that engagement with spiritual resources can facilitate healing from moral injury and post-trauma growth among veterans and active duty military personnel (Koenig, Youssef, & Pearce, 2019). Spiritually integrated approaches intentionally incorporate

spiritual beliefs such as religious practices and meaning reconstruction as pathways to moral repair (Pearce, Haynes, Rivera, & Koenig, 2018). Given this emphasis on meaning and identity, it is likely that the conceptual orientation of the Quiet Ego Scale does not correlate closely with the spiritual mechanisms that drive recovery from moral injury.

Alternatively, meaning and purpose may be more relevant constructs for understanding spiritual maturation and identity formation among veterans in career transitions. The Meaning of Life Questionnaire provides a validated measure of both the presence of meaning and the search for meaning. The MLQ has demonstrated strong reliability and predictive value in prior work (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). Because the Intrinsic Spirituality Scale measures spiritual motivation and connection with the Divine, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire measures coherence and purpose, these instruments combined may provide a more accurate picture of spiritual functioning and growth for veterans preparing for and transitioning to new careers.

This paired assessment strategy of ISS and MLQ also aligns with the principles of the Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren, which emphasizes connection with God, understanding God's plan and purpose for one's life, and integrating spiritual identity into everyday decisions (Warren, 2002). The guided Purpose Driven Life six-week small group program and website provide structure for individuals that could be incorporated into the training model for veterans entering the education field (Purpose Driven, n.d.). Because many veterans report a loss of purpose, identity disruption, and spiritual struggle when transitioning from the highly structured and valued environment of the armed forces to civilian roles, a residency based student teacher model that integrates the Purpose Driven Life intervention with impact measured by ISS and MLQ may support the development of vocational purpose, renewed identity, moral integration, and spiritual restoration in educators.

In conclusion, the present study found no significant relationship between intrinsic spirituality and quiet ego characteristics, and reliability concerns suggest that the Quiet Ego Scale is not suitable for future work. Instead, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire will replace the Quiet Ego Scale in subsequent pilot studies to evaluate spiritual meaning-based development. Future research will also explore whether a Purpose Driven Life-based intervention can strengthen one's connection with the Divine and increase meaning in life, supporting the broader principle that serving a higher purpose contributes to meaning. This will inform efforts to support veterans transitioning into the teaching profession through a spiritually grounded residence training and direct mentorship and student teaching model. These efforts may contribute to improved identity reconstruction, alignment of purpose, and long-term career satisfaction and employment retention for veterans entering education careers.

References:

- Currier, J. M., Foster, J. D., & Isaak, S. L. (2019). Moral injury and spiritual struggles in military veterans: A latent profile analysis. *Journal of Traumatic Stress.*, 32(3), 393–404.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.22378>
- Currier, J. M., McDermott, R. C., Fernandez, P., Salcone, S., Currier, J. M., McDermott, R. C., Hinkel, H. M., Schuler, K., Fadoir, N., & Smith, P. N. (2024). Examining the outcomes and acceptability of a peer-led spiritual intervention for moral injury in a veteran service organization. *Psychological Services.*, 21(2), 276–286.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000762>
- Drescher, K. D., Foy, D. W., Kelly, C., Leshner, A., Schutz, K., & Litz, B. (2011). An exploration of the viability and usefulness of the construct of moral injury in war veterans. *Traumatology*, 17(1), 8–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534765610395615>
- Hodge, D. R. (2003). The Intrinsic Spirituality Scale: A new six-item instrument for assessing the salience of spirituality as a motivational construct. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 30(1), 41–61. https://doi.org/10.1300/J079v30n01_03
- Koenig, H. G., Youssef, N. A., & Pearce, M. (2019). Assessment of moral injury in veterans and active duty military personnel with PTSD: A review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 10, 443.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2019.00443>
- Leary, M. R., Tipsord, J. M., & Tate, E. B. (2008). All-inclusive identity: Incorporating the social and the spiritual self. In H. A. Wayment & J. J. Bauer (Eds.), *Transcending self-interest: Psychological explorations of the quiet ego* (pp. 137–147). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11771-013>

Pearce, M., Haynes, K., Rivera, N. R., & Koenig, H. G. (2018). Spiritually integrated cognitive processing therapy: A new treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder that targets moral injury. *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*, 7, 2164956118759939.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2164956118759939>

Purpose Driven. (n.d.). What is the purpose driven life? Retrieved from

<https://www.purposedriven.com/>

Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). The Meaning in Life Questionnaire:

Assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life. *Journal of Counseling*

Psychology, 53(1), 80–93. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.53.1.80>

Warren, R. (2002). The purpose driven life: What on earth am I here for? Zondervan.

Wayment, H. A., Bauer, J. J., & Sylaska, K. (2015). The Quiet Ego Scale: Measuring the compassionate self-identity. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 16(4), 999–1033.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-014-9546-z>

The Holy Bible, New International Version. (2011). Zondervan. (Original work published 1978)

Appendix

Survey Instrument

Published on Google Forms: <https://forms.gle/tCSAoEAkkyMaaTe97>

Disclosure: I am asking you to complete this survey as part of the requirements for my statistics project in a graduate level psychology course. Your answers will remain completely anonymous. No personal information about you will be linked to this survey. Please do not put your name or any other identifying information on the survey. The results of this survey will be used only for educational purposes and will not be published or released to the public. You must be 18 years old or older to complete this survey.

Demographics:

Biological Sex: Male (coded in SPSS as zero) Female (coded in SPSS as 1)

Part I: Intrinsic Spirituality Scale (ISS)

Directions:

For the following six questions, spirituality is defined as one's relationship to God, or whatever you perceive to be Ultimate Transcendence. The questions use a sentence completion format to measure various attributes associated with spirituality. An incomplete sentence fragment is provided, followed directly below by two phrases that are linked to a scale ranging from 0 to 10. The phrases, which complete the sentence fragment, anchor each end of the scale. The 0 to 10 range provides you with a continuum on which to reply, with 0 corresponding to the absence or zero amount of the attribute, while 10 corresponds to the maximum amount of the attribute. In other words, the endpoints represent extreme values, while five corresponds to a medium, or moderate, amount of the attribute. Please select the number along the continuum that best reflects your initial feeling. (0 means the statement is not true at all for you; 10 means it is completely true for you.)

1. **In terms of the questions I have about life, my spirituality answers...**
 0 – No questions 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 – Absolutely all of my questions
2. **Growing spiritually is...**
 More important than anything else in my life 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 – Of no importance to me
3. **When I am faced with an important decision, my spirituality plays...**
 0 – Absolutely no role 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 – The overriding consideration

4. **Spirituality is „,**
The master motive of my life, directing every other aspect of my life 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3
2 1 0 – Not part of my life
5. **When I think of the things that help me to grow and mature as a person, my spirituality...**
0 – Has no effect on my personal growth 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 – Is absolutely the most important factor in my personal growth
6. **My spiritual beliefs affect...**
Absolutely every aspect of my life 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 – No aspect of my life

Part II: Quiet Ego Scale (Wayment, Bauer, & Sylaska, 2015)

Directions:

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

7. **QES 1- I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.**
1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree
8. **QES 2- I find myself doing things without paying much attention.***
1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree
9. **QES 3- I feel a connection to all living things.**
1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree
10. **QES 4- Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.**
1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree
11. **QES 5- For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.**
1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree
12. **QES 6- I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing ***
1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

13. **QES 7- I feel a connection with strangers.**

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

14. **QES 8- When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to put myself in his or her shoes for a while.**

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

15. **QES 9- I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time**

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

16. **QES 10- I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.***

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

17. **QES 11- I sometimes find it difficult to see things from another person's point of view.***

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

18. **QES 12- I feel a connection to people of other races.**

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

19. **QES 13- I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.**

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

20. **QES 14- When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.***

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

Scoring: (not included in participant survey)

Part I Intrinsic Spirituality Scale (ISS)

Scoring:

- Calculate the **mean** of all six items (range: 0–10).
- Higher scores indicate greater levels of **intrinsic spirituality**, meaning spirituality functions as a central motivating force in one's life

Part II Quiet Ego Scale:

*Reverse-coded items: 2, 6, 10, 11, 14

Scoring: Reverse-code starred items, then average all 14 responses (higher scores = stronger Quiet Ego, i.e., humility, perspective-taking, and self-transcendence).