

Spirituality & Social Justice: The Meaning of Life & Changing the World

What is it?

- The subtitle above says it all—many of our patrons enjoy reading about spiritual traditions and beliefs, as well as inspiring stories of individuals who work to build a better world.
- This widely diverse area of nonfiction is soaring in popularity since titles such as *Eat, Pray, Love* and *Three Cups of Tea*.
- Combining these ideas may be an artificial merging of two separate categories.

Why do people read it? (a.k.a. the appeal factors)

- Affirmation of their own religious or spiritual beliefs
- Understanding of faith traditions and world views different from their own
- Assurance that one person can make a difference
- Opportunity for personal growth and development
- A soothing, reassuring view that in the end “all will be well”

Who reads it?

- Those who are looking for answers to life's deeper questions or stories of individuals who seem to have found these answers
- Readers who enjoy memoirs and, sometimes, Christian fiction
- Faith-based book groups

Genre Overview

Religious History:

- *America's Prophet: Moses and the American Story* by Bruce Feiler
- *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* by Karen Armstrong
- *The Future of Faith* by Harvey Cox

Interfaith Dialogue:

- *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths: How the World's Religions Can Come Together* by the Dalai Lama
- *Living Buddha, Living Christ* by Thich Nhat Hanh
- *The Faith Club: A Muslim, A Christian, A Jew--Three Women Search for Understanding* by Idliby, Oliver, and Warner
- *The Tent of Abraham: Stories of Hope and Peace for Jews, Christians, and Muslims* by Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Sister Joan Chittister, & Murshid Saadi Chishti

Personal Reflections:

- *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith* by Barbara Brown Taylor
- *The Bullhead Queen: A Year on Pioneer Lake* by Sue Leaf

- *The Barn at the End of the World: The Apprenticeship of a Quaker, Buddhist Shepherd* by Mary Rose O'Reilly
- *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* by Anne Lamott
- *Plain and Simple: A Journey to the Amish* by Sue Bender
- *Standing Alone in Mecca : An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam* by Asra Q. Nomani
- *Have a Little Faith* by Mitch Albom
- *Called to Question: A Spiritual Memoir* by Joan Chittister
- *Practicing Catholic* by James Carroll

Social Justice Inspiration:

- *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn
- *The Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World* by Jacqueline Novogratz
- *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty* by Pete Singer
- *Leaving Microsoft to Change the World: An Entrepreneur's Odyssey to Educate the World's Children* by John Wood
- *The Hole in Our Gospel: What Does God Expect of Us?* by Richard Stearns

One Person Making a Difference:

- *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World* by Tracy Kidder
- *There Is No Me without You: One Woman's Odyssey to Rescue Her Country's Children* by Melissa Faye Greene
- *Love in the Driest Season: A Family Memoir* by Neely Tucker
- *The Power of Half: One Family's Decision to Stop Taking and Start Giving Back* by Kevin Salwen and Hannah Salwen

Some other authors you should know

Henri Nouwen • Kathleen Norris • C.S. Lewis • Eckhart Tolle • Huston Smith • Elaine Pagels

Awards:

American Academy of Religion Book Awards

"Christianity Today" Book Awards

Other Resources:

Books on these topics often receive a lot of advance "buzz" from sources like Oprah, newspaper reviews, and pop culture magazines like People. Novelist has several good lists under its "Spirituality and Religion" nonfiction heading. Powells.com allows browsing of new titles in both religion and spirituality. Also, Krista Tippet's American Public Media radio show, "Speaking of Faith," features many such books and their authors.