



Spiritual Assessment Interpretation Guide

Version 3.1



Spiritual Assessment Interpretation Guide

adapted for use by the
Warrior Transition Command
for use in **Warrior Transition Units** and Soldiers
in the Army's Warrior Care and Transition Program

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Foreword

This interpretation guide was written to supplement the Warrior Transition Battalion – Europe’s Spiritual Assessment, which was designed to measure an individual Soldier’s understanding and practice of faith.

The goal of these tools is to allow the Soldier to self-report his or her beliefs in order to assist the Soldier in developing meaningful spiritually guided life goals that are consistent with his or her faith.

It is my sincere hope that this Spiritual Assessment and Guide will help uphold the First Amendment rights of each Soldier while providing the caregiver with a tool to meet the spiritual needs of each Soldier according to the preferences of that Soldier’s faith and conscience.

Respectfully,
Chaplain (CPT) Eric Dean



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Spiritual Assessment Overview

- **It is self-reporting.** The assessment is designed to empower the Soldier to tell the caregiver what he or she believes and needs, as well as what spiritual practices are meaningful to him or her.
- **It does not require the caregiver to embrace any particular view of faith.** Rather, this tool brings clarity to the caregiver on what the Soldier believes, so that the caregiver can assist the Soldier in drafting spiritually-oriented life goals.
- **It does not require the caregiver to have any theological/ministerial training or skills.** Using the S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-Bound) criteria for goal-setting, it is relatively simple to select two or three areas of interest identified in this assessment and to build clear goals around these without necessarily understanding them from a theological or experiential viewpoint.
- **It protects the Soldier's First Amendment rights and personal dignity.** This assessment is a report from the Soldier that demonstrates what is meaningful to him or her. By focusing goal setting on these issues, the goals themselves become more meaningful, the First Amendment rights of each Soldier are protected, and the dignity of each Soldier is honored as they move forward in areas of their spiritual lives that are meaningful to them.



Scoring and Interpretation

- Most scores are on a scale of A-E, with A meaning, “strongly disagree”, B meaning “disagree”, C meaning “neutral”, D meaning “agree”, and E meaning, “strongly agree”.
- Some questions give five statements, instead the letters, A-E, as responds from which the Soldier should choose. When given a statement, the Soldier should choose the one that most accurately reflects his or her beliefs.
- There are four open-ended questions; one at the beginning of the assessment and three at the end. These afford the Soldier the opportunity to describe his or her own faith/spirituality in his or her own words.
- The interpretation guide provides detailed guidance and examples for the first three questions, then general guidance and ideas for the remaining questions.



The Questions

1. “If I had to describe what spirituality looks like to me, I would describe it like this...”

This question is designed to afford the Soldier the opportunity to explain how he or she understands spirituality in his or her own words. Based on the Soldier’s response, develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on the Soldier’s feedback.

Example: “I understand spirituality as being at peace and in tune with everything around me... like when I am on tree stand at 0600 waiting on the deer to show up. Just me and nature.”

Ask about one thing that Soldier could do every day to feel more at peace and in tune with everything around him or her. The Soldier mentioned nature. What about a walk in the woods? What about taking riding lessons at a horse ranch and learning to be one with the horse? Discuss various possibilities with the Soldier and have him or her tell you which meaningful, measurable practice he or she would be interested or willing to set as a spiritual goal. Together with the Soldier, develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on his or her preferred practice. The Soldier should be prepared to discuss what he or she experienced as a result of this exercise at the next scrimmage.

If the Soldier states he or she doesn’t believe in anything other than himself or herself, this may be a therapeutic issue best handled by his or her therapist, as the Soldier’s limitations may cause him or her to experience significant internal/“spiritual” crisis.



The Questions

2. This question is designed to answer whether the Soldier gives any spiritual meaning or context to the joys and struggles of life. If agree or strongly agree, then the outcome is yes. If disagree or strongly disagree, then the outcome is no.

If yes, then an example of a good spiritual goal would be to keep a journal for the next month in which one documents the spiritual lessons learned through medical challenges, (help the Soldier clearly define what these are, i.e. SPC Smith learned that the only thing she can control in life is her response, SGT Jones learned that practicing meditation daily helps him better cope with stressful situations, etc.).

If no, then there is no basis for a spiritual goal need/requirement. Throughout this assessment, it is normal to find that you only have 3-4 goals identified at the end of an assessment. This is perfectly fine because it is very difficult to manage any more than these.



The Questions

3. This question assesses whether a Soldier is
- A. a dedicated follower of some religious belief system
 - B. a person who believes in God, but is content if God is called Allah, Yahweh, Jesus, the Great Spirit, etc.,
 - C. a person in spiritual crisis (has faith in God, but has been disillusioned),
 - D. an agnostic (does believe that there is some sort of higher power), or
 - E. an atheist (does not believe in God at all).

Goal Setting Examples from Question 3:

If the Soldier responds with “A” – ask what that faith is. Ask about meaningful practices of that faith. Pick one or two that the Soldier indicates would be interesting to develop.

Example: prayer. Have the Soldier pray 5 minutes per day for deeper knowledge of his or her God, greater self-awareness, and for his or her family members. The Soldier should keep a journal of what he or she prayed for each day and be prepared to discuss at next scrimmage what was learned from the experience.

If the Soldier responds with “B”, a spiritual goal might be for the Soldier to start with the system of faith, religion, etc., that is most appealing to him or her and to study how that system of faith has historically helped people in times of suffering. At the end of the month, the Soldier could report how faith can – or cannot - help someone in times of adversity.

If the Soldier responds with “C”, there is unresolved spiritual tension. **Do not try to discuss this issue or to attempt therapy with the Soldier.**

Instead, a good spiritual goal would be for the Soldier to write down the specific reasons why he or she is angry at God and to address those either with the chaplain, social worker, or psychologist.

At the next scrimmage, the Soldier should share what he or she learned as a result of this exercise. If he or she is uncomfortable with that, then simply verify with the Soldier that he or she talked to a behavioral health counselor or chaplain.



The Questions

Goal Setting Examples from Question 3:

If the Soldier responds with #4 or #5, the most effective option is to proceed to the next question on the assessment.



The Questions

4. This question is designed to determine if a Soldier's goals in life are influenced by a particular understanding of God or spirituality.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask for an example.

Based on that example, see if there are current life goals linked to faith. If so, (and if they are healthy, realistic goals), then link those into the goal setting plan.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", then proceed to the next question.

5. This question is designed to determine if a Soldier's spirituality gives his or her life meaning and purpose.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask for an example.

One effective goal might be to have the Soldier identify those spiritual resources that have helped him or her in the past to overcome adversity and to develop a plan to effectively use those resources to aid in overcoming their present medical/professional challenges. The Soldier would write these in a journal at least one per week, and present the examples at their next scrimmage.

If not, or if the Soldier responds "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", then proceed to the next question.



The Questions

6. This question is designed to identify the Soldier's sense of meaning through community.

If the Soldier responds with "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask for an example.

Based on that example, set a spiritual goal that involves being a part of a community of others who share a similar faith. Even if connecting with other living beings only means connecting with nature and animals, set a S.M.A.R.T. goal that causes the Soldier to interact with nature and animals.

If not, or if the Soldier responds "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", then proceed to the next question.

7. This question is designed to identify the Soldier's specific use of religion as a resource in times of adversity.

If the Soldier responds with "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask for an example.

One effective goal might be to have the Soldier identify the spiritual resources that have helped him or her in the past to overcome adversity and then derive a plan of how to effectively use those resources to help overcome their present medical/professional challenges. The Soldier would write these down in a journal describing how he or she used at least one resource per week, and present those examples at the next scrimmage.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.



The Questions

8. This question is designed to determine if a correlation exists between a Soldier's perceived closeness with God and his or her own sense of meaning and purpose.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask for an example. Based on the Soldier's response, ask if there was any meaningful spiritual practice that helped create this sense of closeness with God. If so, develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based off of this response.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.

9. This question is designed to determine whether the Soldier's spiritual beliefs give his or her life meaning and purpose.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask for an example of one spiritual practice that is especially helpful to him or her. If so, develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on that response. If none exist, proceed to the next question.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.



The Questions

10. This question is designed to determine if any particular religious or spiritual practices are meaningful or helpful to the Soldier.

If the Soldier responds, “agree” or “strongly agree”, then ask which spiritual practices are meaningful. Then develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on these.

Example: Attending worship service.

Ask about current frequency of attendance. If current level is once a month, plan for twice a month. If current level is Christmas and Easter, or the High Holy Days, or Eid Al Fat’r, then increase that worship attendance in small, realistic increments.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with “neutral”, “disagree”, or “strongly disagree”, proceed to the next question.

11. This question is designed to determine whether a Soldier’s sense of purpose is linked to his or her faith.

If the Soldier responds, “agree” or “strongly agree”, then ask the Soldier to explain or to give you an example to help you better understand the linkage.

Example: A Warrior’s mission is to heal and transition.

Talk with the Soldier about one spiritual practice that can help the Soldier stay “mission focused” during the difficult time of healing and facing the unknown. Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this practice.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with “neutral”, “disagree”, or “strongly disagree”, proceed to the next question.



The Questions

12. Like Question #11, this question is designed to determine whether a Soldier's sense of purpose is linked to his or her faith. This redundancy is intentional.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask the Soldier to explain or to give you an example to help you better understand that Soldier's faith.

Example: You know, when I was going to church and praying all the time, I knew what God's will for my life was. Since I've been in the Army though, I've stopped going to church and praying. Now it just seems like all I can do is to try to make it one day at a time.

Talk with the Soldier about one spiritual practice that can help the Soldier stay "mission focused" during the difficult time of healing and facing the unknown. Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this practice.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.

13. This question is designed to determine whether a Soldier's sense of faith helps to keep a healthy sense of perspective on the ups and downs of life.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask the Soldier to explain or to give you an example to help you better understand the Soldier's sense of faith.

Example: "Yeah, like the time my dad died... I knew it would be o.k. because I sensed God there with me".

Talk with the Soldier about one spiritual practice that can help the Soldier continue to sense God's presence during the difficult time of healing and facing the unknown. Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this practice. Some examples might include prayer, reading a sacred text, meditation, etc.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.



The Questions

14. This question is designed to determine the correlation between a Soldier's sense of significance and his or her spiritual faith.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask the Soldier to explain or to give you an example to help you better understand that Soldier's faith.

Example: "Well, I was raised to believe that God is in control and all things happen for a reason".

Talk with the Soldier about one spiritual practice that can help the Soldier improve his or her feelings of significance through a meaningful spiritual practice. Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this practice. Example: what does your sacred text say about who you are in God? (Tip: for the Christian, have them study the book of Ephesians and write down in a journal every verse that explains who they are "in Christ.")

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.



The Questions

15. This question is designed to determine whether a Soldier's sense of meaning, even in the most routine or mundane activities, is driven by a his or her faith.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask the Soldier to explain or to give you an example to help you better understand that Soldier's faith.

Example: "Yeah, well, people have this bad view of Muslims – they think we are all terrorists, but I want to show them that Islam has helped me to be a good Soldier and a good person".

Talk with the Soldier about one spiritual practice that can help the Soldier continue to sense either a spiritual presence or God's presence during the difficult time of healing and facing the unknown. Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this practice. Some examples might include: prayer, reading a sacred text, meditation, etc.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.



The Questions

16. This question is designed to determine whether a Soldier's sense of purpose is linked to his or her faith.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask the Soldier to explain or to give you an example to help you better understand that Soldier's faith.

Example: "I feel that God wants me to be a good Soldier, wife, and mother".

Talk with the Soldier about one spiritual practice that can help the Soldier become a better Soldier, wife, and/or mother, (it can be a practice that addresses all three, or just one of the three). Some examples include: attending a marriage or parenting seminar, completing some correspondence courses, attending an Army school, etc. These aren't spiritual, per se, however, they will help the Soldier address those things that are important to his or her faith system. Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this discussion.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.



The Questions

17. This question is designed to determine whether a Soldier's sense of purpose is linked to community, the greater good, etc.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask the Soldier to explain or to give you an example to help you better understand that Soldier's faith.

Example: "Well, I signed up after 9/11 to defend my country against the terrorists. I couldn't just sit back and watch our country go to war and not do my part."

Talk with the Soldier about one area of growth that can help the Soldier maintain that sense of purpose as he or she is unable to serve in the way he or she had intended to. An example might be to gain college credit in a discipline that would better position the Soldier to work for the government, even if separated due to medical issues. This might be one way to connect this Soldier's patriotic convictions and his or her new reality. Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this discussion.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.



The Questions

18. This question is designed to determine whether a Soldier's sense of faith gives comfort in times of adversity.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask the Soldier to explain or to give you an example to help you better understand that Soldier's faith.

Example: "I don't know why this happened to me... I've been a good Soldier and done everything right... still, I got cancer. Even though I don't understand this, I know that God has carried me through."

Talk with the Soldier about one spiritual practice that has been meaningful to the Soldier during this difficult time of healing and facing the unknown. Maybe it has been to know that people are praying for him or her. Ask the Soldier what it would be like for him or her to start praying in routinely. Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this practice.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.



The Questions

19. This question is designed to determine if there is a sense of congruency between a Soldier's current position in life and his or her sense of God's will for his or her life.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask the Soldier to explain or give you an example to help you better understand that Soldier's faith.

Example: "I never thought I would be MED-boarded, but you know, I believe that if God closes this door, he'll open another."

Talk with the Soldier about one spiritual practice that has helped this Soldier keep his or her faith during the difficult time of healing and facing the unknown. Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this practice.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.



The Questions

20. This question is a bit more specific; asking the Soldier to go beyond identifying with vague spiritual terms of reference to clearly define what religion means to him or her. Furthermore, it is designed to determine the degree to which formalized spiritual practice (i.e. religion) plays in giving the Soldier hope.

If the Soldier responds, “agree” or “strongly agree”, then ask the Soldier to explain or to give you an example to help you better understand that Soldier's faith.

Example: “I am a Jew and through the example of my grandfather who survived the Holocaust, I know that my God can give me the strength for anything life throws at me.”

Talk with the Soldier about one spiritual practice that helped his or her grandfather during the Holocaust which might also help him or her during the difficult time of healing and facing the unknown. Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this practice.



The Questions

21. This question is designed to measure to what degree spiritual feelings add meaning to life's situations.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask the Soldier to explain or give you an example to help you better understand that Soldier's faith.

Example: "You know, when my kids were born, I felt God's love."

Talk with the Soldier about one spiritual practice that can help the Soldier sense God's presence and love even in the most uncertain situations. Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this practice. Perhaps it looks like meditating on that experience at childbirth or writing that phrase in a journal. This is decided jointly with the Soldier as to what this looks like for him or her.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.



The Questions

22. This question is designed to determine to what degree faith guides the Soldier's major life decisions.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask the Soldier to explain or to give you an example to help you better understand that Soldier's faith.

Example: "Before I joined the Army, I prayed about it. I just knew that it was right. Now, I am praying about going back to college to finish my degree in information technology."

Talk with the Soldier about the MEB process and how it will be important to stay connected to his or her faith during this time of waiting. Suggest that regardless of what the MEB decides, maintaining peace with God will be crucial. Ask them how they best do this... what spiritual practice helps most to maintain peace with God? Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this practice.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.



The Questions

23. This question is designed to determine to what degree spirituality influences a Soldier's decision-making process.

If the Soldier responds, "agree" or "strongly agree", then ask the Soldier to explain or to give you an example to help you better understand that Soldier's faith.

Talk with the Soldier about one spiritual practice that can help the Soldier as he or she moves forward in the MARR or MEB process. Develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on this practice.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree", proceed to the next question.



The Questions

24. This question is designed to determine if the Soldier receives spiritual strength/encouragement from speaking with a spiritual leader.

If the Soldier responds, “agree” or “strongly agree”, then ask the Soldier to explain or to give you an example to help you better understand that Soldier's faith.

Example: “My family and I go to church off-post. The minister there has walked with us through this whole ordeal and we’re always encouraged whenever he talks with us/prays with us.”

Talk with the Soldier about setting a regular meeting with his or her minister or chaplain as one of his or her spiritual goals. Ask the Soldier to keep a journal; writing 1-2 lines about the conversation/meeting he or she had with the minister or chaplain and to be prepared to share/discuss, as appropriate, at the next scrimmage.

If not, or if the Soldier responds with “neutral”, “disagree”, or “strongly disagree”, proceed to the next question.



The Open Questions

1. “No matter how bad things get, I feel most at peace when I...”

This question is designed to afford the Soldier to tell you what gives him or her a sense of peace in times of adversity. Based on the Soldier’s response, develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on the Soldier’s feedback.

Example: “Go for a walk in the woods.”

Ask about a time when this helped. Talk with the Soldier about this experience and develop a goal that has the Soldier taking walks in the woods for a specific period of time in routine intervals. An example might be to walk for one hour every week. If appropriate, encourage the Soldier to conduct these with a spouse/friend. The Soldier should be prepared to talk about these experiences with Chaplain, Behavioral Health, etc., and to report on its effect in his or her life at the next scrimmage.

If the Soldier has nothing that he or she can look to for peace, then an appropriate goal is to have that Soldier talk with a behavioral health specialist about his or her perspective and ask the behavior health specialist to substitute the element of peace with a goal that is expected to bring about peace.



The Open Questions

2. “_____ give me hope.”

This question is designed to afford the Soldier to state what gives him or her hope. Based on the Soldier’s response, develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on the Soldier’s feedback.

Example: “My family.”

Ask about a time when this helped. Talk with the Soldier about this experience and develop a goal that has the Soldier doing specific, positive, family-strengthening activities. An example might be spend three hours every weekend doing something as a family, (i.e. bowling, visit a castle, family movie night, etc.) The Soldier should keep a journal of these activities. The Soldier and spouse, as appropriate, should be prepared to talk about these experiences and to report on its effect at the next scrimmage.

If the Soldier has nothing that he or she can look to for peace, then an appropriate goal is to have that Soldier talk with a behavioral health specialist about his or her perspective and ask the behavior health specialist to substitute the element of peace with a goal that is expected to bring about peace.



The Open Questions

3. “If God were standing here, the one thing I would like to tell God is...”

This question is designed to afford the Soldier to voice his or her spiritual frustration or satisfaction. Based on the Soldier’s response, develop a S.M.A.R.T. goal based on the Soldier’s feedback.

Example: “Why did you take my buddies and let me live?”

Ask about that experience. Define the driving emotion behind it, such as survivor’s guilt or anger at God. Talk with the Soldier about this experience and develop a goal that has the Soldier redirecting his or her energies from guilt or anger to rediscovering the joys of life, or the gifts that God has given. An example might be to write a list of those things that bring the Soldier joy or that the Soldier finds inspiring, (i.e. his or her children, watching a sunrise, seeing someone recover from a life-threatening illness/injury, overcoming personal challenges, etc.) The Soldier should keep a journal of these things for 30 days and at the end of each day of reporting, write the phrase, “thank you for letting me live to see that.” The Soldier and spouse, as appropriate, should be prepared to talk about these experiences and to report on its effect at the next scrimmage.

If the Soldier is unwilling to work with you to find an appropriate goal, this may be a therapeutic issue best handled by his or her therapist and/or possibly the chaplain, depending on the Soldier’s faith background.



Conclusion

Helpful Points to Remember

1. Be careful to avoid trying to offer counseling/therapy. The purpose of this tool is to assist in setting S.M.A.R.T. goals. If you sense there is an issue that needs therapy, suggest this as a possible goal.
2. Be careful not to convey any sense of judgment regarding spirituality/religion. You may not share the Soldier's faith, but do try to give their faith the same dignity and respect you would want to receive for your own beliefs.
3. If directly asked and if appropriate, you may share a personal example of how your own spirituality has helped you, if you feel that doing so will assist the Soldier. Be careful to ensure that this can not be misinterpreted later as an attempt to convert someone to your faith.
4. Remember, the focus on the Soldier's goal-setting, and you will do great! You have such an important role in the overall plan for transitioning our Soldiers. If you stay focused, you will touch more lives than you can imagine; entire Families, Warriors, people who will work with and for these Warriors later in life, etc. Your work with them will bring clarity, hope, and healing. So, thank you for all you do.



Source Citation

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