

Purpose & Pivots in the Second Half of Life

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Executive Summary: Purpose & Pivots in the Second Half of Life

As the United States experiences an unprecedented demographic shift toward an aging population, understanding how older adults find purpose and navigate life changes becomes increasingly critical. The Center for Spiritual Fitness conducted a comprehensive study of 2,500+ adults, examining the intersection of spiritual growth, life satisfaction, and personal transformation in the second half of life.

Key Findings

Life Satisfaction and Spiritual Growth

- Individuals at the highest level of spiritual growth (P4) - those who are actively mentoring others - report significantly higher life satisfaction across all domains compared to their peers.
- Women consistently report lower overall life satisfaction than men, regardless of spiritual stage.
- Satisfaction increases with spiritual growth stage across most life domains, with particularly strong correlations in spirituality and community engagement.

Life Pivots and Transformation

- The vast majority of adults (84-96%) report experiencing significant life pivots, with career and financial changes being the most common catalysts.
- Uniquely, spiritual pivots stand out as the only type of life change consistently associated with increased satisfaction post-transition.
- P3 individuals (those regularly engaging with spiritual practices but not mentoring others) show the lowest rate of recent pivots, with nearly half not having made a significant life change in over 10 years.

Hope and Well-being

- Spiritual growth stage strongly predicts levels of hope, with more spiritually mature individuals reporting higher levels of optimism.
- Multiple factors contribute to hope in older adults, including satisfaction with recreation, family relationships, personal growth, and spiritual life.
- Age positively correlates with spiritual satisfaction, suggesting that spiritual fulfillment often deepens in later life.

Implications

These findings highlight the vital role of spiritual growth and meaningful engagement in fostering well-being among older adults. As the U.S. population continues to age, there is a pressing need for resources and support systems that:

- Encourage spiritual development and mentorship opportunities
- Support individuals through life transitions, particularly in career and financial domains
- Foster community connections and personal growth opportunities
- Facilitate spiritual engagement through prayer, faith sharing, and biblical study

The data strongly suggests that investing in spiritual growth and creating opportunities for older adults to mentor others could significantly enhance life satisfaction and hope in the aging population. This has important implications for religious organizations, community groups, and policymakers focused on supporting healthy aging in America.

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Purpose & Pivots in the Second Half of Life

The United States population is aging at an unprecedented rate. From 1980 to 2022, the median age increased from 30 years to 39 years. By 2050, it's expected that one out of four Americans will be over the age of 65 (Mather & Scommegna, 2024). This incredible demographic shift presents both challenges and opportunities for our society.

The Center for Spiritual Fitness wanted to explore the spiritual lives of older Americans. We conducted surveys with two audiences focused on purpose and pivots in the second half of life. For this analysis, we focus on responses from 2,000+ US adults in the general population and 500+ respondents from Back to the Bible's constituency. In this report, we explore how older adults view this stage of life and what leads to the most hope and life satisfaction.

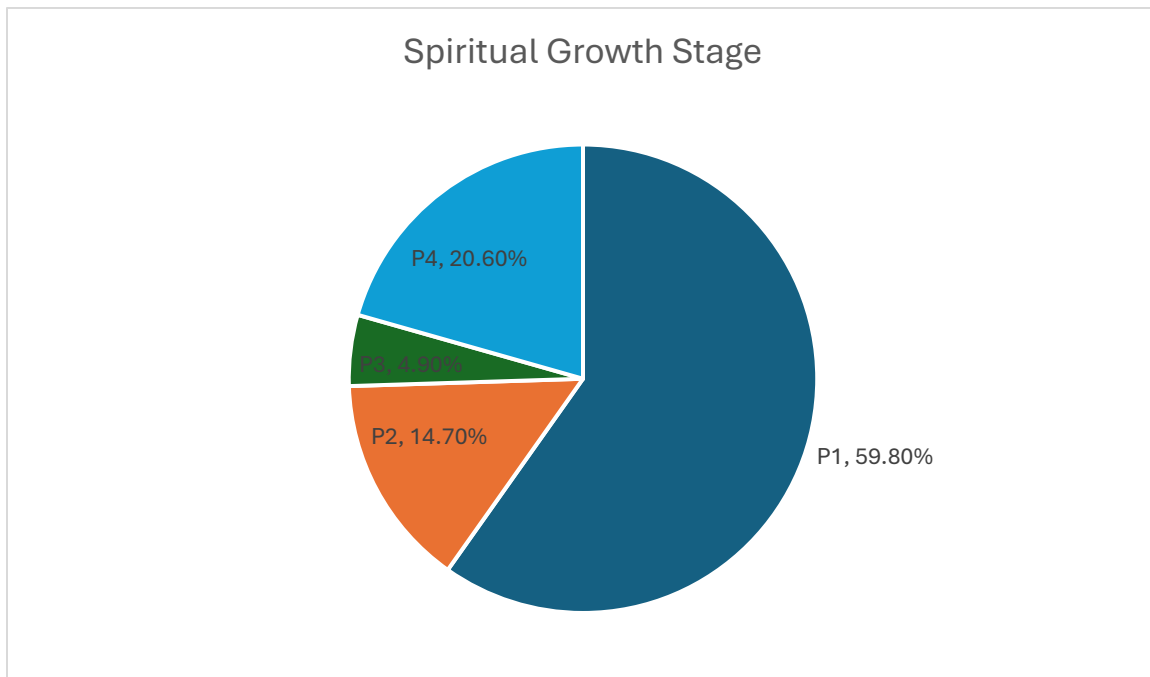
Spiritual Stages

The Center for Spiritual Fitness's Spiritual Stage model provides a critical framework for understanding spiritual growth and is useful when exploring purpose and pivots in the second half of life. The model identifies four spiritual stages, indicated by P-level where P indicates priority in Christian ministry.

- **P1s** are individuals who indicate that they don't believe they are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. From a ministry perspective, P1s need evangelism.
- **P2s** are individuals who indicate that they are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. However, they aren't engaging with the Bible at a level (i.e. four or more days a week) that leads to spiritual growth. P2s need discipleship.
- **P3s** are individuals who are saved by grace and are engaging with the Bible most days of the week. Although they may be growing in their faith, they aren't involved in discipling or mentoring others in their spiritual growth. From a ministry perspective, P3 need activation to share their faith.
- **P4s** are individuals who are saved by grace, are engaging with the Bible most days of the week and are actively discipling or mentoring others in their faith.

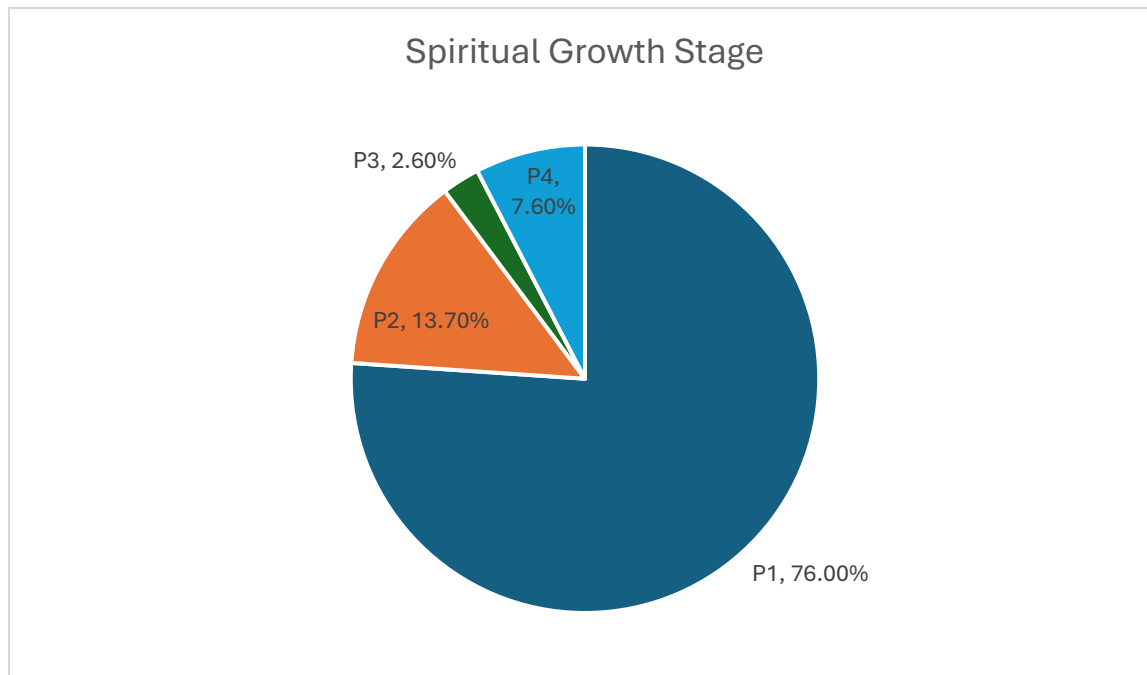
Figure 1 shows the distribution of P levels among the respondents to our Second Half survey. Three-fifths of our sample are P1 – those who don't have a saving relationship with Jesus. The next most common group, largely from the Back to the Bible ministry audience, are P4s, comprising 20.6% of the total sample.

Figure 1. Spiritual Growth Stage of Survey Sample.



It's important to note that the data presented in Figure 1 reflect our total sample, not necessarily in the United States population. Figure 2 shows our general population sample weighted to reflect the United States population over the age of 40, by gender. Three of four adults over the age of 39 are P1s, in need of evangelism.

Figure 2. Spiritual Growth Stage for U.S. Adults Over Age 39.



Life Satisfaction

Researchers have long considered life satisfaction an important factor in the aging process. Life satisfaction is significantly correlated with life expectancy and longevity among older adults (Diener & Chan, 2011). Dissatisfaction, conversely, is associated with an increase in mortality (Koivumaa-Honkanen, Honkanen, Viinamäki, Heikkilä, Kaprio, & Koskenvuo, 2000). In other words, the happier you are with your life, the longer you're likely to live. The less satisfied you are with your life, the sooner you're likely to die.

We examined life satisfaction in our survey with the Wheel of Life from the Positive Psychology Practitioners Toolkit (citation). Respondents indicated on a eleven-point scale (0 = not satisfied at all, 10 = highly satisfied) how satisfied they are with each of ten life domains:

- Money & finance
- Career & work
- Health & fitness
- Fun & recreation
- Environment
- Community

- Family & friends
- Partner & Love
- Growth & learning
- Spirituality

We summed the scores for all domains to calculate a global life satisfaction score as well. Figure 3 shows the mean Global Life Satisfaction ratings by gender and spiritual stage. Regardless of spiritual growth stage, women are less satisfied with their lives than men. Global Life Satisfaction is significantly higher for P4s than for any other spiritual growth stage.

Figure 3. Global Life Satisfaction by Gender and Spiritual Growth Stage.

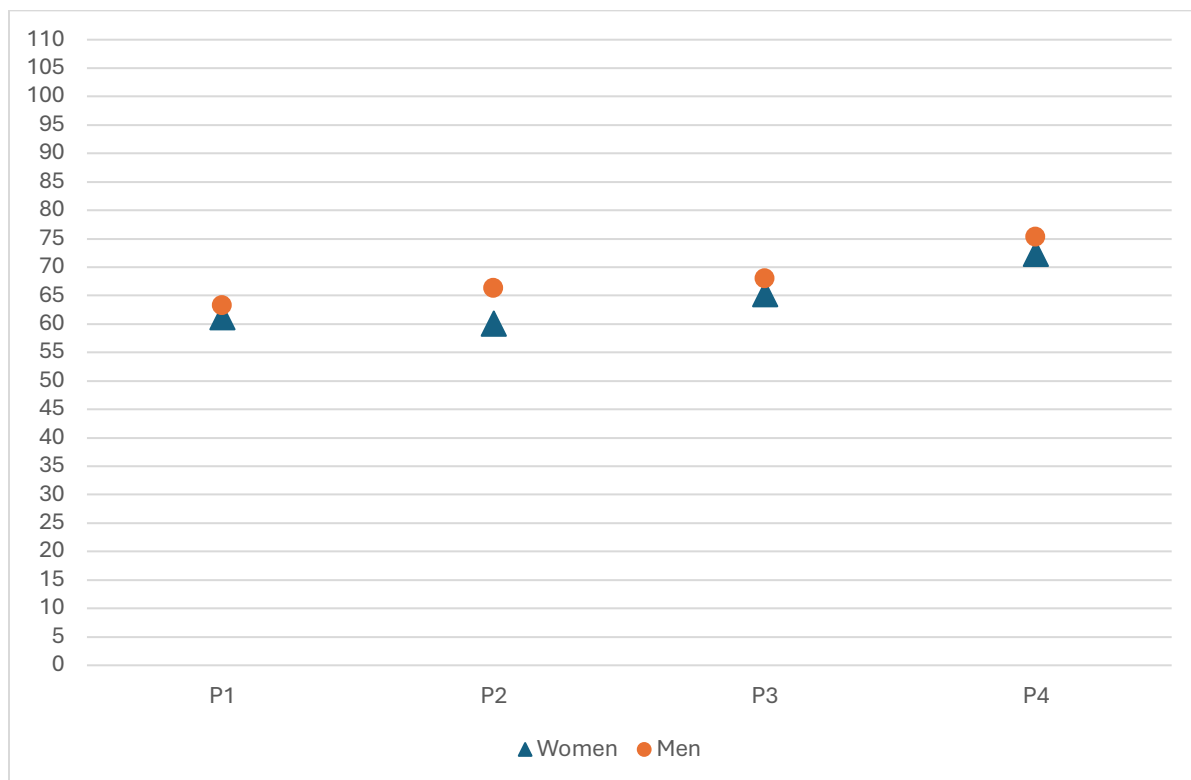


Table 1 displays the satisfaction ratings for each domain by spiritual stage and gender. We find several statistically significant differences:

- Men are more satisfied with their Money & Finances, Career & Work, Health & Fitness, Fun & Recreation, and Partner & Love than women.
- Women are more satisfied than men with their Family & Friends and Spirituality.
- Spiritual growth stage is positively correlated with satisfaction in all domains. P4s have significantly higher satisfaction levels than all other spiritual growth stages in all domains except Spirituality and Fun & Recreation.

- For Fun & Recreation, P1s have significantly lower levels of satisfaction than P2s, P3s, and P4s, who don't differ from each other.
- For Spirituality, P3s and P4s are significantly more satisfied than P1s and P2s.

Table 1. Life Satisfaction by Domain, Gender, & Spiritual Growth Stage.

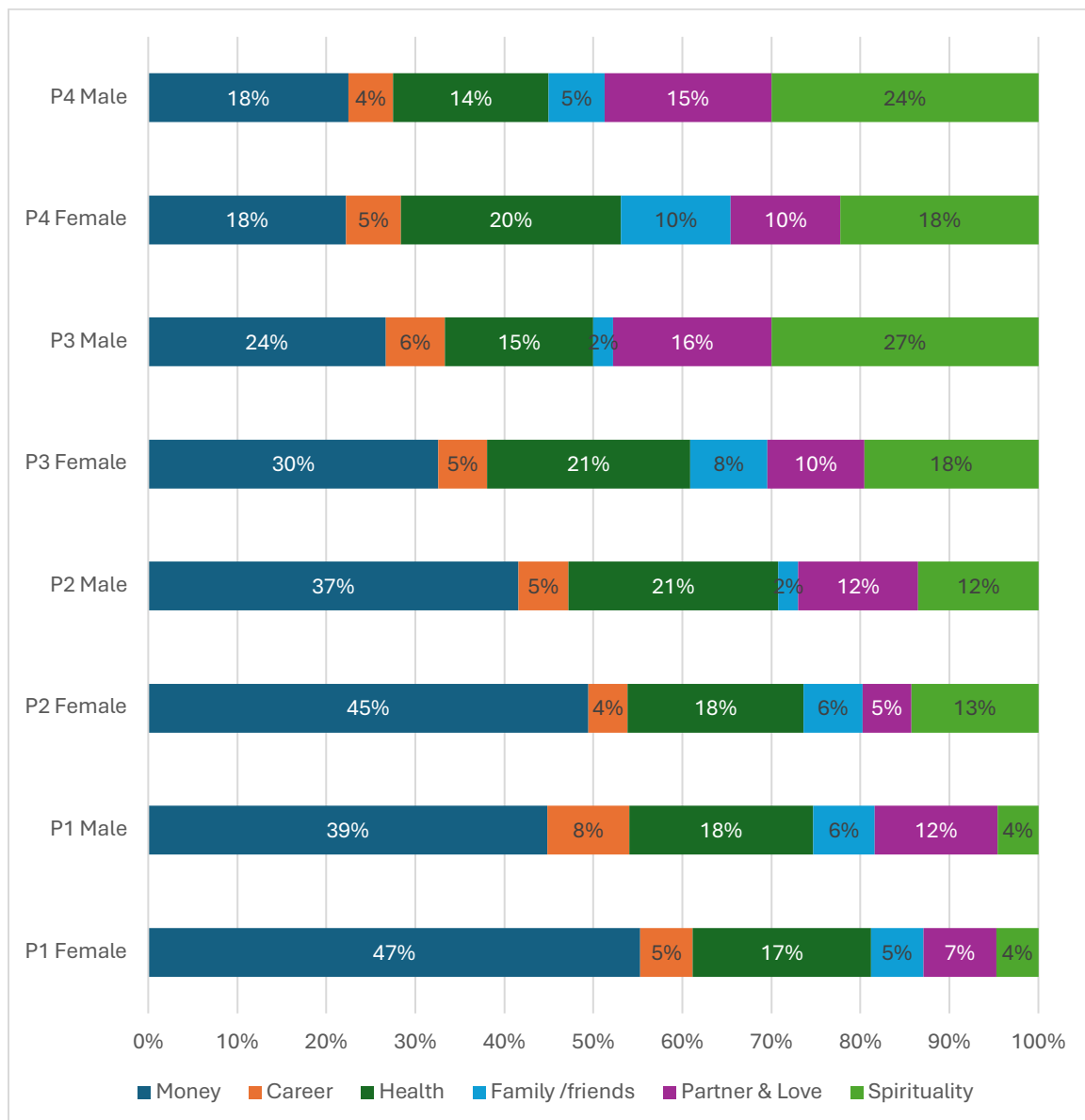
Domain	P1	P2	P3	P4
Money & Finance  	4.77 5.82	4.73 5.63	5.84 6.02	6.82 7.04
Work & Career  	5.46 6.11	5.19 6.48	6.34 6.36	6.98 7.64
Health & Fitness  	5.71 6.09	5.13 5.62	5.82 6.64	6.53 6.96
Fun & Recreation  	5.84 6.36	5.41 6.19	6.17 6.34	6.33 6.87
Environment  	6.21 6.33	6.06 6.60	7.23 7.02	6.42 7.33
Community  	6.26 6.26	6.19 6.52	6.56 6.35	7.28 7.15
Family & Friends  	7.55 7.19	7.54 7.78	8.23 7.58	7.69 8.15
Partner & Love  	5.96 6.24	5.51 7.08	5.93 7.18	7.00 7.76
Growth & Learning  	6.85 6.88	6.68 6.89	7.86 6.96	7.04 7.92
Spirituality  	6.67 6.14	7.71 7.61	8.48 7.98	8.58 8.50

What do you want to change?

It's not surprising to find that satisfaction is correlated with what domain older adults would like to change in their lives. Figure 4 displays data on which domain they would like to change most, by gender and spiritual growth stage.

For P1s and P2s, Money & Finance is the most popular area to change. This shifts for P3s and P4s with Money & Finance becoming less common and spirituality rising in prominence.

Figure 4. What Domain Would You Like to Change?



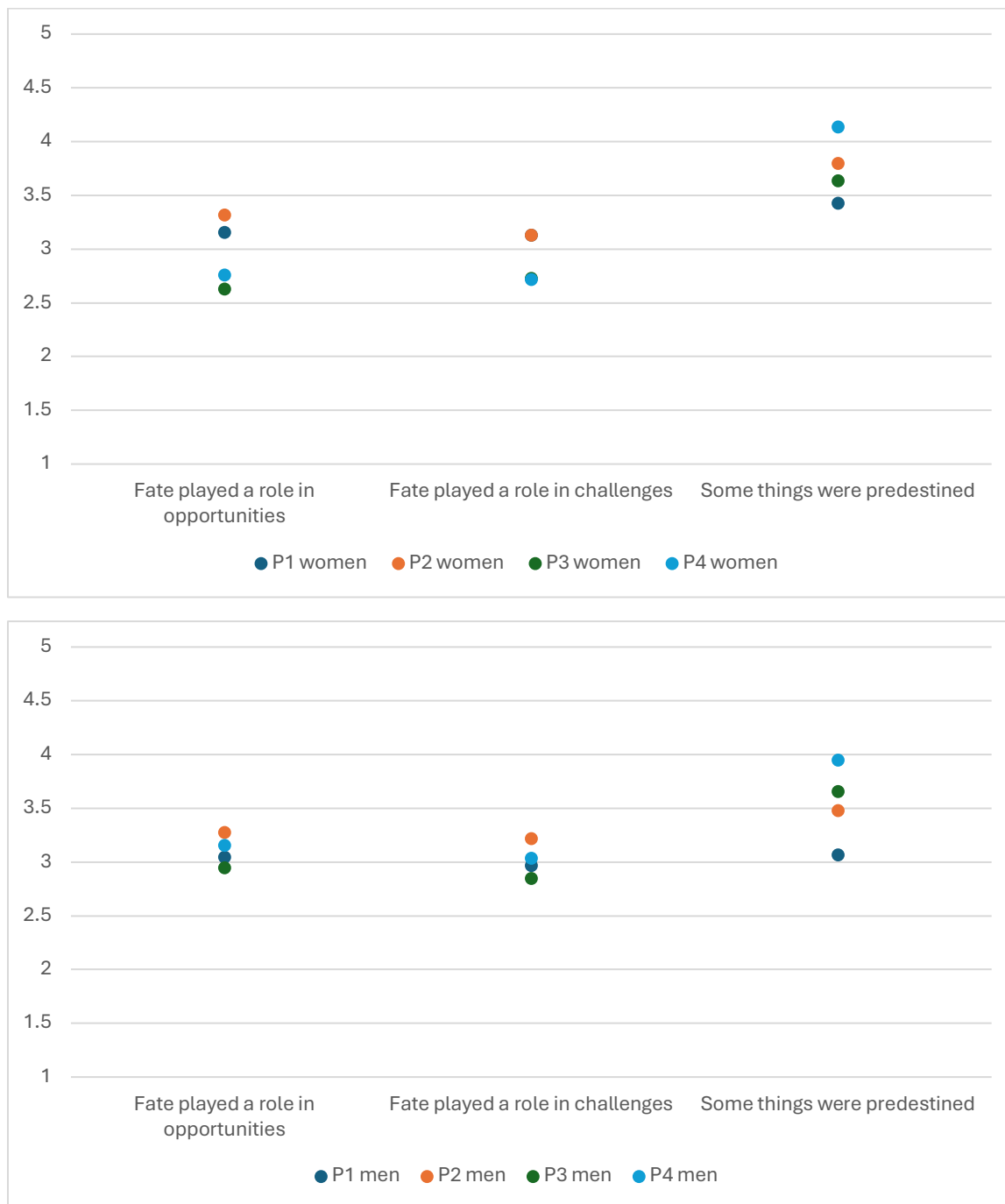
Fate and Predestination

Adults in the second half of life often find themselves taking stock of their lives – their careers, relationships, and other life choices. How they view their lives, whether with peace or with regret, may be affected by their beliefs in fate and predestination.

We included three questions in our survey to explore adults' beliefs. Each question is rated on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The following figures display the mean ratings by gender and spiritual growth stage. Several statistical significant trends are evident:

- Men are less likely to believe in predestination than women.
- People in the more advanced spiritual stages express lower beliefs in fate.
- P4 women have the highest belief in predestination.

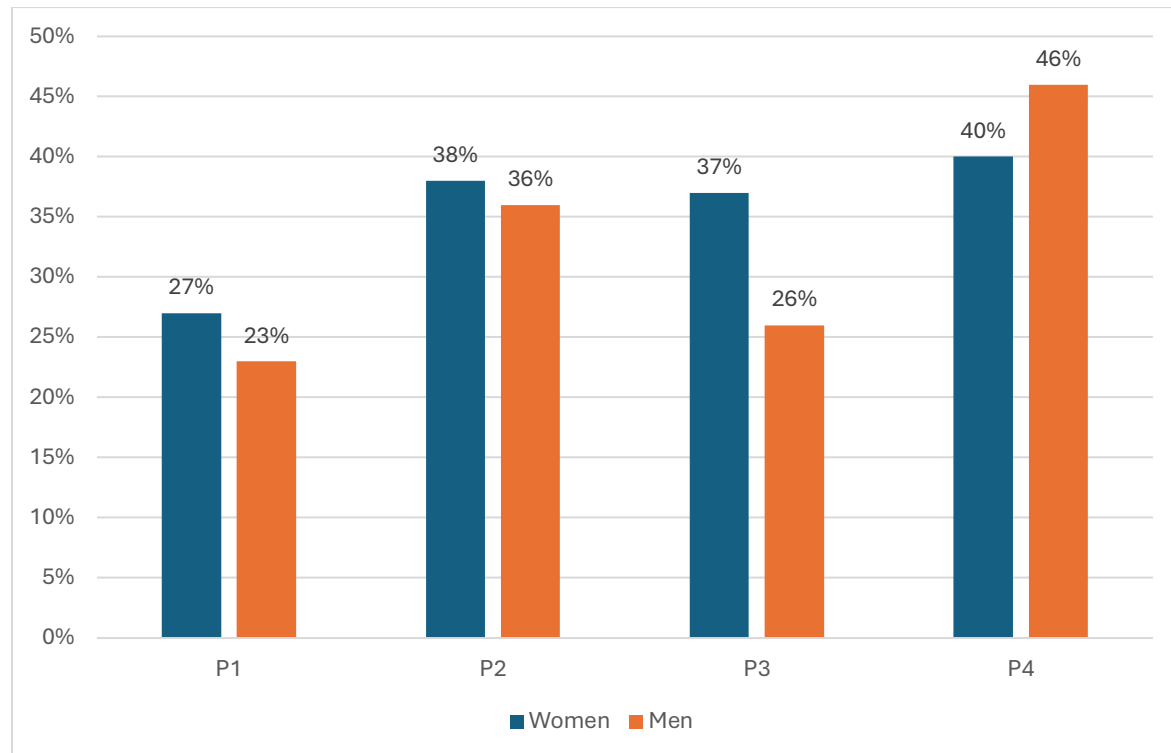
Figure 5. Beliefs about Fate & Predestination.



How do older adults' beliefs about fate and predestination affect how they view life challenges? Not surprisingly the answer varies by spiritual growth stage. Among P1s, only about a quarter feel empowered by their beliefs. Curiously, the percentage is nearly the

same among P3 men. P2 women, P2 men, and P3 women are more likely to feel empowered than their P1 counterparts. Nearly half of P4 men feel empowered by their beliefs.

Figure 6. Percent who feel empowered because of their beliefs about fate.



Hope

Hope has emerged as an important in positive psychology and our understanding of resilience (Rasmussen, England, & Cole, 2022). Research shows that hope plays an important role in mental health, physical health, and longevity. For those facing challenges associated with aging, hope is an important element of overall well-being.

Our hope scale is based on 5 questions rated on a 5-point scale with higher scores indicate feeling more hope and purpose in life. We asked respondents to rate how they feel now and how they felt 10 years ago.

Essentially a “perfect” hope score would be 25. Across gender and P levels, respondents indicate a high level of hope now and ten years ago. Only P4s express a higher level of hope now than they did 10 years ago.

Figure 7. Hope Scale Means by P Level – Women.

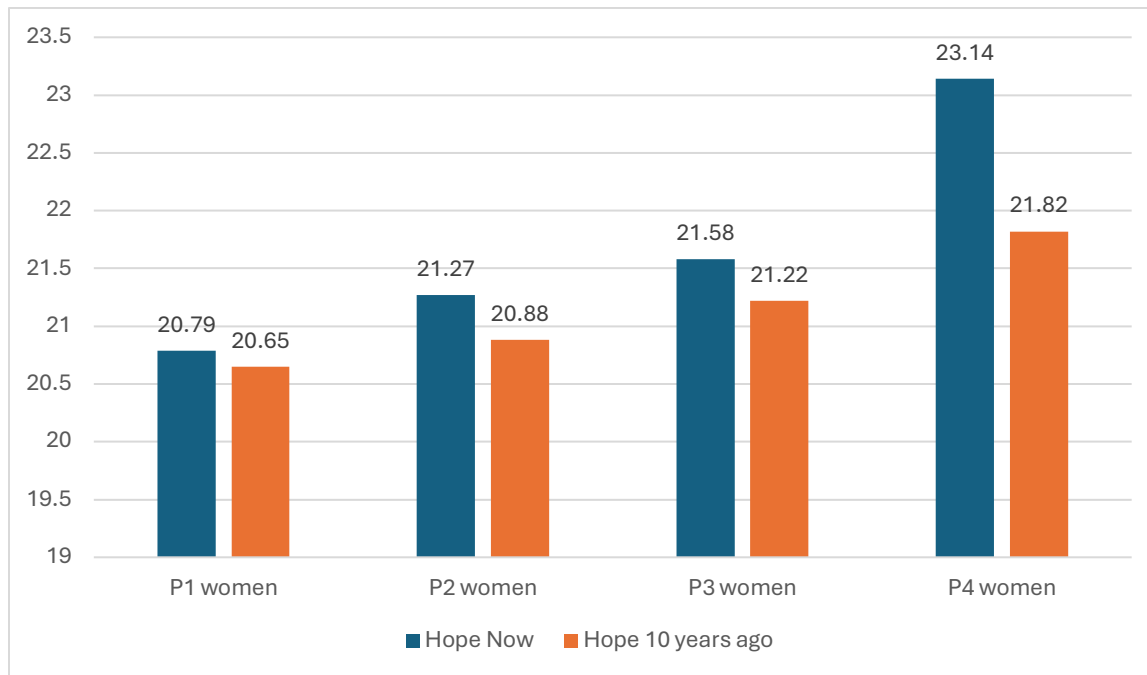
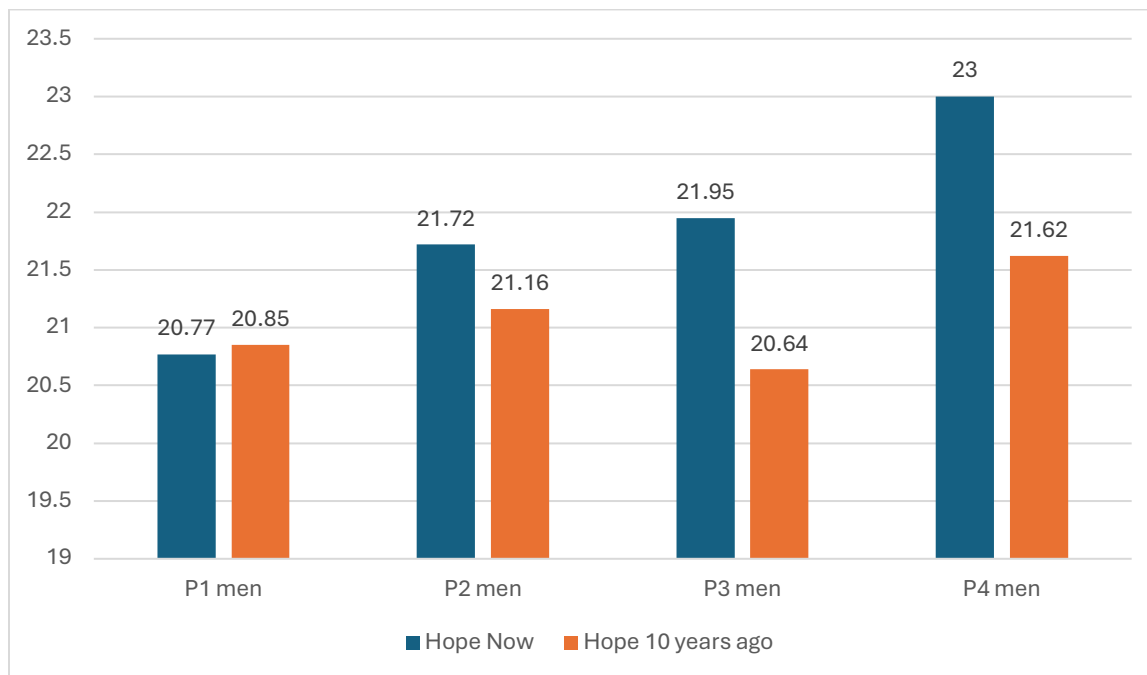


Figure 8. Hope Scale Means by P Level – Men.



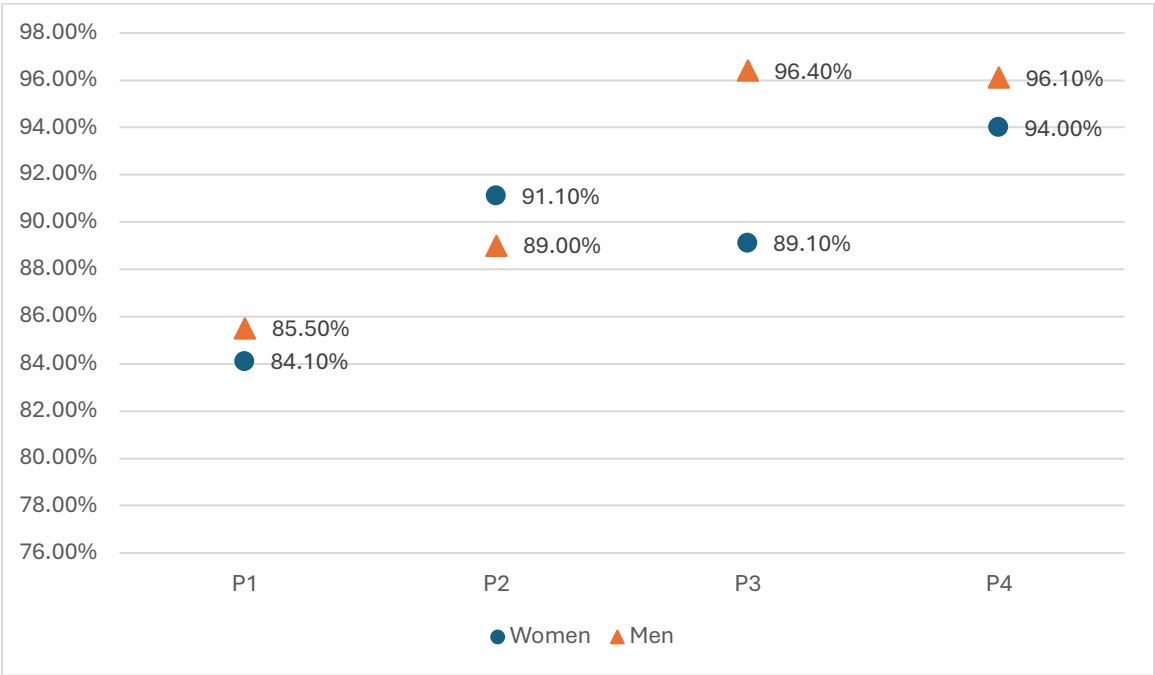
Pivots

As we navigate life, we often find that we either want to or need to pivot our lives in some way. Pivoting can be stressful yet also life giving to prevent us getting stuck and

complacent, particularly in the area of faith. We asked survey respondents about their experiences with pivot.

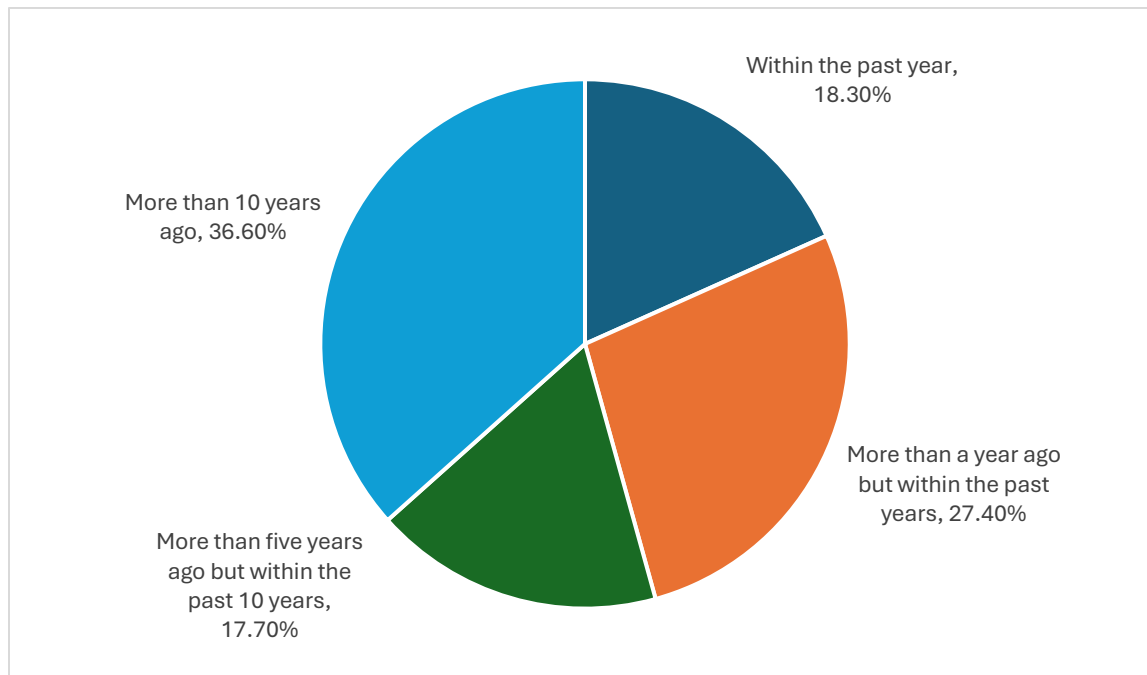
Most adults have had to pivot their lives at some point. Rates vary somewhat by gender and spiritual growth stage, from 84% among P1 women and 96% among P3 and P4 men.

Figure 9. Percent Who Have Pivoted.



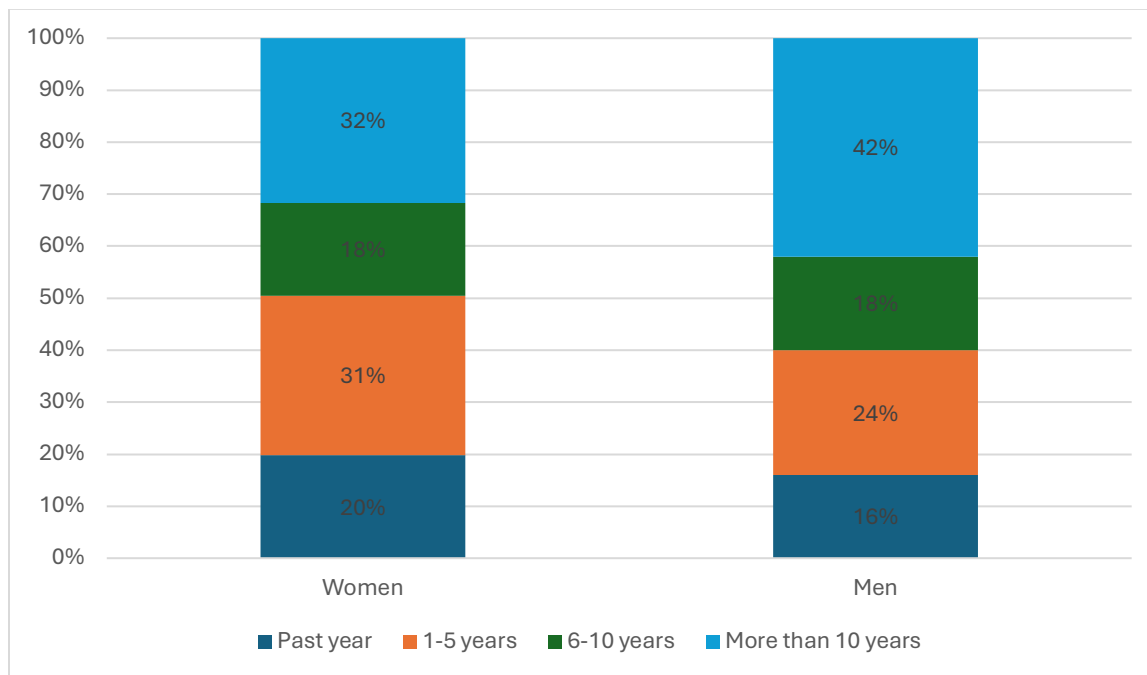
We asked respondents to think about when their most recent pivot occurred. The following figure illustrates considerable variability. For more than a third, it had been more than 10 years. Nearly one in five has pivoted in the past year.

Figure 10. When was your most recent pivot?



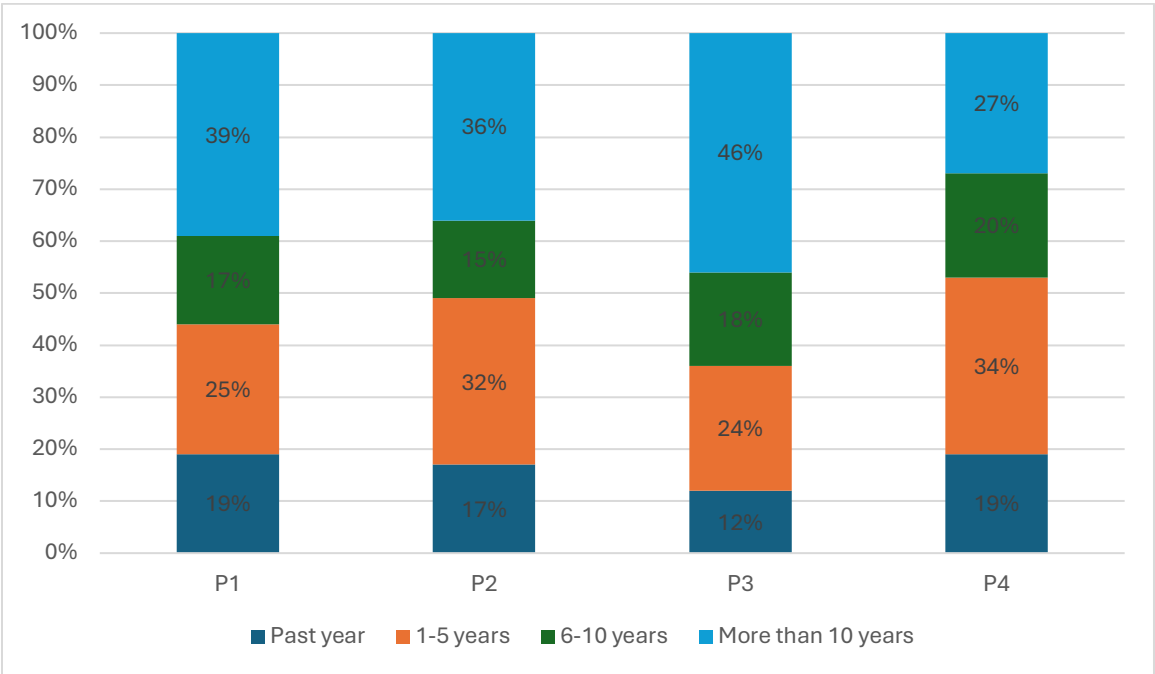
We find interesting differences based on gender and spiritual growth stage. The pivots women have made occurred more recently than the ones for men.

Figure 11. Pivot Timing by Gender.



For P3s, those in need of activation, pivots generally occurred a long time ago. Nearly half of P3s have not pivoted in more than 10 years.

Figure 12. Pivot Timing by Spiritual Growth Stage.



For most adults, their most recent life pivot involved career & work. Other common areas affected were money/finance, partner/love and friends/family. Spirituality was the third most common pivot area for P4 men.

Table 2. Most Common Areas Affected by Recent Pivots.

Spiritual Growth Stage	Women	Men
P1	Career/work 37% Money/finance 29% Partner/love 24%	Career/work 52% Money/finance 26% Partner/love 21%
P2	Career/work 42% Money/finance 32% Family/friends 29%	Career/work 52% Partner/love 26% Money/finance 24%
P3	Career/work 47% Money/finance 28% Partner/love 25%	Career/work 57% Money/finance 29% Partner/love 23%
P4	Career/work 43% Family/friends 29% Money/finance 25%	Career/work 52% Money/finance 25% Spirituality 24%

What Pivots Lead to Greater Life Satisfaction?

People may need to pivot in a life domain for a variety of reasons, some positive (e.g., becoming a parent) and some negative (e.g., losing a job). We wanted to explore how pivots relate to life satisfaction in that domain. When we compare life domain satisfaction levels between those who made a pivot in that domain and those that didn't, we typically find either no difference OR, lower satisfaction among the pivoters. The exception is Spirituality. Those who made a spirituality pivot report significantly higher levels of satisfaction with their Spirituality, than those who didn't pivot.

Figure 13. Pivots & Satisfaction by Domain – 1.

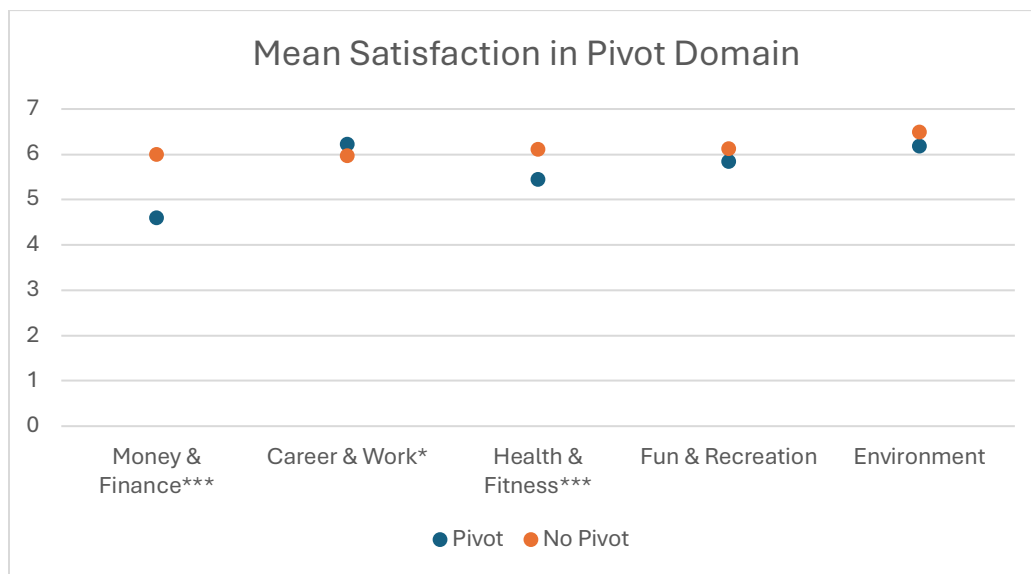
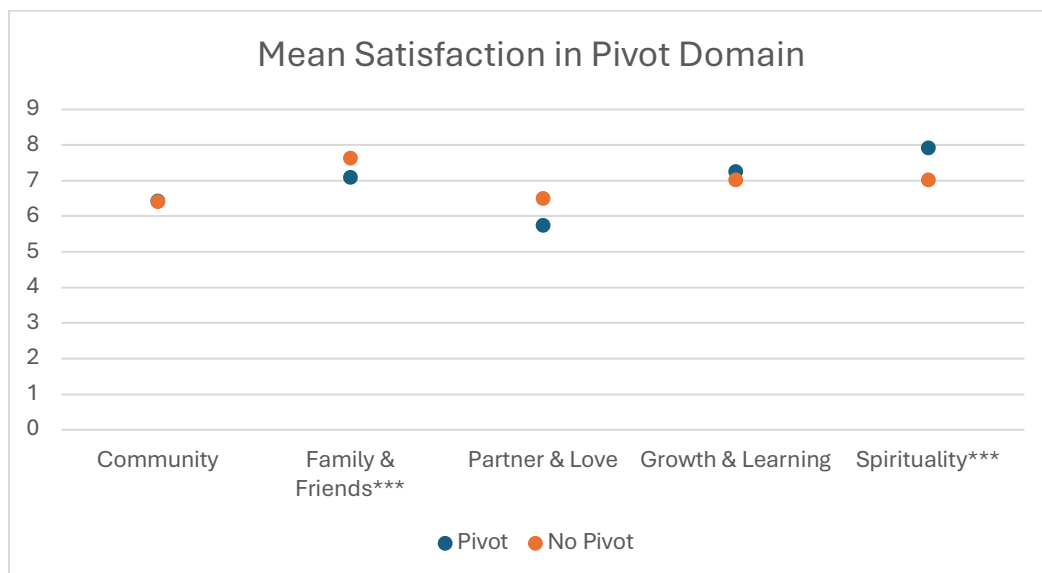


Figure 14. Pivots and Satisfaction by Domain - 2.



Predicting Hope

Emerging research indicates that optimism and hope play a significant role in longevity and thriving in later life. In our study, we explored what factors predict current feelings of hope among older adults.

Table 3 displays the results of a multiple regression analysis predicting current feelings of hope. We find that Spiritual Growth Stage has a positive association with hope. Those at high levels (e.g., P4 compared to P2) experience greater hope. Moreover, satisfaction in several life domains also predicts greater hope.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Results Predicting Hope.

Predictor	Coefficient	Standard Error	Probability Level
Age	.001	.006	.840
Gender	.095	.139	.494
Spiritual Growth Stage	.322	.062	<.001
Pivoted in the past	.294	.214	.169
Current Satisfaction			
Fun & Recreation	.200	.042	<.001
Family & Friends	.316	.039	<.001
Growth & Learning	.202	.043	<.001
Spirituality	.154	.033	<.001
Money & Finance	.105	.029	<.001
Health & Fitness	.125	.037	<.001
Community	.082	.041	.043
Adjusted R Square	.323		
F	102.111		<.001

Predicting Spiritual Satisfaction

We also used predictive analytics to examine what factors best predict people's satisfaction with their spirituality. Table 4 displays the results of that multiple regression analysis. We find that satisfaction increases as age increases and as the individual's involvement in these activities increases: prayer, sharing your faith or spiritual beliefs with someone, talking to a friend or family member who doesn't live with you, and reading or listening to the Christian Bible.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Results Predicting Spiritual Satisfaction.

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>Probability Level</i>
<i>Age</i>	.019	.004	<.001
<i>Activities</i>			
<i>Pray</i>	.298	.021	<.001
<i>Share my faith or spiritual beliefs with someone</i>	.172	.028	<.001
<i>Talk to a friend/family member who doesn't live with me</i>	.068	.021	.002
<i>Spend time in nature</i>	.045	.020	.024
<i>Read or listen to the Christian Bible</i>	.049	.022	.030
<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	.268		
<i>F</i>	724.366		<.001

Conclusions

The journey through the second half of life is marked by profound shifts in purpose, spiritual growth, and personal satisfaction. As our data suggests, spiritual engagement plays a pivotal role in shaping life satisfaction, hope, and the sense of purpose among older adults. Those who have reached the highest stage of spiritual growth where they are investing in others, particularly P4s, report the highest levels of satisfaction across various life domains, especially in their spiritual lives and personal relationships. This underscores the importance of fostering meaningful connections, both with God and with others, to enhance well-being during this life stage.

Life pivots, though often challenging, are significant catalysts for personal growth and resilience. Pivots that involve spirituality are unique in showing increased satisfaction following change. For those feeling stagnant, our findings suggest that intentional shifts in relationships and spirituality can reinvigorate purpose and bring renewed satisfaction. These pivots not only impact individual well-being but also provide a ripple effect, as those at higher spiritual stages often serve as mentors, enriching the lives of others in their communities.

In light of the rapid aging of the U.S. population, this report highlights a pressing need for resources and support that cater to the evolving spiritual and personal growth needs of older adults. Encouraging engagement in spiritual practices and facilitating opportunities for mentorship could be transformative strategies for supporting older Americans in finding deeper purpose, satisfaction, and hope.

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