



FAQ: Spiritual Fitness, Religion, & The Command Religious Program

What is the difference between spirituality and religion?

While both encompassing beliefs, values, and practices and addressing aspects belonging, purpose, and meaning, spirituality refers to a personal experience with many definitions, while religion is a distinct set of beliefs and practices expressed within a community or group.¹ All religions are forms of spirituality, but not all forms of spirituality are religions.

What's the purpose of Spiritual Fitness? Is Spiritual Fitness part of the Command Religious Program?

CJCSI 3405.01 and research identify Spiritual Fitness' importance in optimizing overall performance and supporting other areas of fitness². Title 10, U.S.C. protects an individual's right to choose whether or not to exercise their religious freedom or not. This right is reflected in DoD, DoN, and Marine Corps policy governing Command Religious Programs and religious ministry, and is distinctly different than Spiritual Fitness.

While Marines may choose to participate in the Command Religious Program to maintain their Spiritual Fitness, Spiritual Fitness is not part of the Command Religious Program.

Can my Chaplain support my Spiritual Fitness?

Absolutely! Chaplains are responsible for the care and well-being of all Marines, regardless of beliefs, and stand ready to facilitate their spiritual needs. Marines should be aware that Chaplains also have a responsibility to adhere to the tenants of their Religious Organization, and may have distinct viewpoints on spiritual beliefs, values, and practices that may not agree with the Marine's view.

The best approach is to engage the chaplain who will listen, learn, help, and appropriately support your spiritual fitness. They are there to support you, and provide total confidentiality.
(SECNAVINST 1730.9A)

I don't believe in "God" or a higher power. Can I choose not to address my Spiritual Fitness?

Addressing spiritual fitness is a personal choice and is not a requirement. However, it is highly unlikely an individual has neutral or no beliefs. We all believe or value something (e.g. family, vocation, Marine Corps, etc.). Clarifying those values can clarify one's purpose, meaning, and belonging. That is often why people join the Marine Corps and choose to make a career of it!

We all face challenges and adversity in our lives. For elite warriors such as Marines, this is a certainty as the nation's force in readiness, "first to fight." While there are many ways to be resilient, a mature spirituality, maintained through spiritual fitness, has been shown to be an important source of strength and resilience to which to draw from.³

¹ Puchalski, CM, et al. (2014) "Improving the spiritual dimension of whole person care. Reaching a national and international consensus." *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 17(6), 642-656.

² Worthington, D & Deuster, P. (2018) "Spiritual Fitness: An Essential Component of Human Performance Optimization," *Journal of Special Operations Medicine*, 18(1), 100-105.

³ Vanshdeep, S. Pietrzak, R. (2017) "Religion, spirituality, and mental health of US military veterans: Results from the National Health and Resilience in Veterans study. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, Vo. 217. 197-204.