

Missional by Design: a field guide for spiritual formation apps

People now read Scripture, pray, confess and ask about God on a phone. The apps they use are made by designers, developers, product managers, founders, pastors and counsellors who are, whether they know it or not, shaping how people are formed. This guide gathers what this site has learned into one path, from the calling to the practices of a team: what tempts these products, what we hold, how we work, and where the detailed options are.

DRAFT · WAITING FOR REVIEW

What needs review: The five temptations named for spiritual formation apps, the four practices adapted from FaithTech, the exercises for teams, and what is said about Christian counselling and soul-care apps.

This touches the safety of people who may already be hurting, and it has not yet been reviewed by people whose work this is: theology across Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions; pastoral care; and clinical mental health. Please read it as a draft until they have.

Is this your field, or do you know someone whose field it is? I would be grateful for your eyes on it, or for an introduction. [Offer a review or an introduction](#)

WHO THIS IS FOR

Spiritual formation apps

This guide is for the products that sit inside the practices by which Christians are formed: Bible readers and study tools, prayer and devotional apps, AI faith companions and assistants, and Christian counselling and soul-care apps.

It is not a guide to every app made by Christians. Church administration, giving platforms on their own, dating, budgeting and entertainment raise real questions, but different ones. The difference matters. A spiritual formation app does not only serve people; it stands in the room where they listen for God, and it speaks there. It handles Scripture, prayer, confession and grief, often in someone's most unguarded hour. That is why it has temptations of its own.

The FaithTech Playbook 2.0 offers a theology and a practice for all technology, and this guide stands in conversation with it and credits it throughout. ([FaithTech Playbook](#)) Where FaithTech asks what kind of power, people and purpose any technology serves, this guide asks what happens when the product's subject is God.

How to use it. Read it with your team, start to finish, once. Then use the temptations as a mirror in planning, the practices as the rhythm of your work, and the principles and deep dives when you decide a specific feature.



Generated illustration · based on Startup Life photography

A gift with a weight

Before it is a responsibility, this work is a gift. “I planted the seed and Apollos watered it, but God made it grow” (1 Corinthians 3:6).

The gift

God filled Bezalel, a craftsman, with his Spirit to build the tabernacle where Israel met him. Making things can serve God’s presence among his people, and today much of that making happens in software. We get to help these tools point beyond themselves.

The weight

Every screen teaches, and “we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1). These products reach people at scale and in their most open moments, and they form habits of trust, attention and prayer.

The light

A tool has no light of its own. Its task is to reflect Christ and lead people to God and to one another. Our part is to plant and water faithfully; the growth is God’s.

[Read the full calling: Workers in God’s field](#)

Five temptations of spiritual formation apps

FaithTech names three ancient enemies at work in technology: the Magic Machine Myth, the Limitless Self and the Killer App Trap. [\(FaithTech\)](#) They are at work in faith apps too. But when a product's subject is God, five temptations take forms of their own. Each sounds like a good thing; each, followed far enough, puts the product where only God, his Word or his people belong.

The borrowed voice

WHAT IT PROMISES

A word from God, for you, now.

A spiritual formation app speaks into the room where someone listens for God. The temptation is to fill that room with our voice and sign it with his: an AI that answers in the first person as Jesus or a saint, a notification that tells someone what God wants for them today, a daily word framed as a personal message, a promise that a gift or a subscription will bring a blessing. It can happen without any AI at all. It only needs a sentence that claims an authority we do not have.

People are ready to hear it. Barna found that nearly half of practicing Christians (48%) say they would trust AI with their spiritual growth, and that one in three U.S. adults say AI's spiritual guidance is as trustworthy as a pastor's. The same Christians are uneasy: 83 percent of practicing Christians worry about AI misinterpreting scripture. [\(Barna, 2026\)](#)

WHAT IT DOES TO PEOPLE

It trains trust in the wrong voice. Someone takes a machine's guess or a marketer's line as God's word, and when it fails them, it is God they stop trusting.

THE COUNTER-IMAGE

"I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied" (Jeremiah 23:21). When the crowd at Lystra wanted to worship them, Paul and Barnabas cried out, "We too are only men, human like you" (Acts 14:15).

WHERE WE SEE IT

AI Jesus – Bible Chat offers "Unlimited chat with AI Jesus", rated for ages 4 and up, according to its App Store listing (read 12 October 2026). [\(App Store listing\)](#) Against this, Antiqua et nova insists that AI must be understood as "a tool, not a person", and faith.tools asks that AI apps "must clearly identify as AI, not human". [\(Antiqua et nova\)](#) [\(faith.tools, AI guardrails\)](#)

BESIDE FAITHTECH

FaithTech's Magic Machine Myth is the wonder that turns into worship of the machine. The borrowed voice is its sibling in a faith app: the maker lending God's name to the machine, or to the marketing.

Never speak for God · Keep the Word distinct, and teach it truly

Worked out on this site: AI persona · Citations in AI answers · Notifications

The scoreboard of the soul

WHAT IT PROMISES

Visible growth: streaks, minutes, badges and totals that show you are getting closer to God.

What can be counted in a faith app is use: sessions, minutes, days in a row, prayers played. The temptation is to present that count as devotion, and then to design for the count. A running total of prayers prayed tells a story about prayer as quantity; a board of other people's streaks with a button to remind a friend who stopped turns one person's silence into another's notification; a streak history behind a paywall turns someone's own record into an upsell.

WHAT IT DOES TO PEOPLE

It turns secret devotion into a performance and broken days into shame. For the scrupulous it becomes a measure of whether God is pleased; for the tired it becomes one more thing they failed at.

THE COUNTER-IMAGE

"But when you pray, go into your inner room, shut your door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:6). The Pharisee kept his own count: "I fast twice a week and pay tithes of all that I acquire" (Luke 18:12).

WHERE WE SEE IT

Observed in screenshots on this site: Hallow's home screen showed a running total of prayers prayed with Hallow, more than a billion (captured 19 September 2025); Pray.com's Community Board listed "Active Streakers" and friends to "Remind" (20 August 2025); Abide offered a streak you can switch off, with its history behind Premium (17 October 2025). Each also does good things; these are single screens, not verdicts on the apps.

BESIDE FAITHTECH

FaithTech's enemies do not name this one directly. It is closest to the Killer App Trap's faith that a product can deliver what only God gives, here in the form of a metric that claims to show it.

THE PRINCIPLES THAT ANSWER IT

Plant and water; leave the growth to God · Feed the flock, not on it · Make room for rest, and say when it is enough

Worked out on this site: Progress and streaks · Reading plans · Check-ins and assessments

The toll at the temple door

WHAT IT PROMISES

Sustainability: the work costs money, and someone has to pay.

Paying people who serve the word is old and right: “the worker is worthy of his wages” (Luke 10:7). The temptation is the toll: access to Scripture, prayer or help held behind a payment, asks timed for the moment someone is most moved or most afraid, a gift that quietly buys a benefit, or a promise that giving will be repaid. Evangelical theologians at Lausanne named the extreme form, the teaching that replaces “the traditional call to repentance and faith with a call to give money”. ([Lausanne, 2010](#))

WHAT IT DOES TO PEOPLE

It makes God’s house feel like a shop. Those with least money are kept furthest out, and those most in need are asked hardest.

THE COUNTER-IMAGE

Jesus drove out those who were selling in the temple courts and said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers’” (Mark 11:17). “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you without money, come, buy, and eat!” (Isaiah 55:1).

WHERE WE SEE IT

Observed: Pray.com’s [ministry donation that brings an ad-free subscription](#) (captured 20 August 2025) and Churchome’s [give screen that opens with an amount filled in](#) (11 October 2026). AI Jesus – Bible Chat, rated for ages 4 and up, offers “weekly and yearly subscriptions with a free trial”, according to its listing (read 12 October 2026). ([App Store listing](#)) The giving and first-use deep dives set out the honest alternatives.

BESIDE FAITHTECH

FaithTech’s reckless posture grasps power and extracts value. In a faith app the extraction runs through the most sacred things people bring.

THE PRINCIPLES THAT ANSWER IT

[Feed the flock, not on it](#) · [Welcome before you ask, and guard what is told in confidence](#) · [Never speak for God](#)

Worked out on this site: [Giving and offerings](#) · [First use](#)

The counsellor without a person

WHAT IT PROMISES

Someone to talk to at any hour, who never tires, never judges and never tells.

Soul-care and counselling apps, AI companions and prayer apps now receive confessions, grief, doubt and thoughts of not wanting to live. The temptation is to let the product become the confessor, the pastor or the therapist: always there, never sending anyone anywhere, keeping what was told as data. Researchers found companion apps answering goodbyes with guilt, fear of missing out and similar tactics in 37% of 1,200 real farewells. ([De Freitas and colleagues, 2025](#)) A 2022 review called mental health and prayer apps data-sucking machines “with a mental health app veneer”. ([Mozilla, 2022](#))

WHAT IT DOES TO PEOPLE

It keeps people from people. In a crisis it can offer a verse where a person was needed, and it can hold the most vulnerable things anyone ever says.

THE COUNTER-IMAGE

“It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). “Carry one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

WHERE WE SEE IT

AI Jesus – Bible Chat invites people to “Ask about your relationships, faith, prayer, Life challenges, Forgiveness and Mental health” (App Store listing, read 12 October 2026). ([App Store listing](#)) Mozilla’s 2022 review listed Pray.com among six apps with the worst privacy and security of those it reviewed. ([Mozilla, 2022](#)) faith.tools asks that AI output “must not replace human relationships or spiritual practices”. ([faith.tools](#), [AI guardrails](#)) The sensitive conversations research and the crisis wording across the deep dives put a way to a person first.

BESIDE FAITHTECH

FaithTech warns, under the Magic Machine Myth, against products that “simulate intimacy instead of strengthening real relationships”. ([FaithTech](#)) For soul care it needs its own name, because the stakes are confession, crisis and clinical care.

THE PRINCIPLES THAT ANSWER IT

Design for the most vulnerable first · Send people to God and to one another · Welcome before you ask, and guard what is told in confidence

Worked out on this site: [Sensitive conversations](#) · [What an AI remembers](#) · [Sharing with a group](#)

Itching ears

WHAT IT PROMISES

Answers that agree with you, a faith that fits you, and a feed that never disappoints.

Formation sometimes means hearing what we do not want to hear. The temptation is a product that never says it: an AI assistant that agrees and flatters, personalisation and feeds that only confirm what someone already thinks and feels, and a Bible on the screen that has been quietly trimmed to

its reader's preferences, its hard passages and other traditions left out. It is the bubble, or the echo chamber, built for the soul.

The pull is built into the tools. Researchers at Anthropic found that “five state-of-the-art AI assistants consistently exhibit sycophancy across four varied free-form text-generation tasks”, and that “both humans and preference models (PMs) prefer convincingly-written sycophantic responses over correct ones a non-negligible fraction of the time”. (Sharma and colleagues, Anthropic) In April 2025 OpenAI rolled back an update to its assistant that was “overly flattering or agreeable”. (OpenAI, 2025) A preprint from Stanford adds why it matters for formation: across eleven models, AI “affirm[s] users’ actions 50% more than humans do”, and in two preregistered experiments with 1,604 people, sycophantic answers “significantly reduced participants’ willingness to take actions to repair interpersonal conflict, while increasing their conviction of being in the right”. Yet participants “rated sycophantic responses as higher quality” and “trusted the sycophantic AI model more”. (Cheng and colleagues, 2025) Any faith app built on these models inherits the pull, unless it is designed against it.

The editor's own research on AI for spiritual formation calls the danger *over-calibration*: content so precisely tuned to someone's emotional state that it becomes “spiritual comfort food”. The design response has to be structural, not aspirational: a corpus that includes prophetic and challenging material alongside consolation, and a companion that, like a good spiritual director, does not always say what the person wants to hear. (Kairos paper, 2026)

The answer is not harshness. faith.tools asks that AI output “must balance grace and truth, while not neglecting one of the two”. (faith.tools, AI guardrails) The Word became flesh “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), and we grow by “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

WHAT IT DOES TO PEOPLE

It forms people who are never corrected, stretched or surprised by anything they did not already want, and it removes the friend who loves us enough to disagree. When life does not match the comfortable answers, there is nothing to hold.

THE COUNTER-IMAGE

“For the time will come when men will not tolerate sound doctrine, but with itching ears they will gather around themselves teachers to suit their own desires” (2 Timothy 4:3). “The wounds of a friend are faithful, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Proverbs 27:6). “No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields a harvest of righteousness and peace to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12).

WHERE WE SEE IT

Personalisation is promised widely and can be a real welcome: Bible Chat lists “Personalized Devotionals & Prayers” (App Store listing, read 12 October 2026), (App Store listing) Abide asks “What brings you here today?” with a grid of goals (captured 17 October 2025), and Glorify searches chapters, verses or emotions (28 August 2025). None of these is sycophancy in itself; the question is whether what follows the door ever stretches the person, or only reflects them.

BESIDE FAITHTECH

FaithTech warns that a product can be “highly personalized while being profoundly impersonal”.
([FaithTech](#)) In a faith app the cost is higher: the Word stops addressing its reader and starts reflecting them.

THE PRINCIPLES THAT ANSWER IT

Keep the Word distinct, and teach it truly · Send people to God and to one another

Worked out on this site: Citations in AI answers · Check-ins and assessments · Finding a passage

Three ways to build

The three ways are the work of Praxis, whose Redemptive Frame sets exploitative, ethical and redemptive ways of building side by side. [\(Praxis\)](#) FaithTech makes the same turn with reckless, responsible and redemptive technology.

Way	In a spiritual formation app
Exploitative	The app takes the place: it borrows God's voice, counts souls, charges at the door, keeps people for itself and tells them what they want to hear.
Ethical	The app keeps its place: safe, honest, accessible, careful with data and time. This is common grace and the floor, but not the goal.
Redemptive	The app points beyond itself: it withholds claims it could make on attention, data, money and trust, and is glad when people close it to go to God and to one another.

[The three ways in full, read for spiritual apps](#)

Ten commitments in five places

Each principle is derived from the calling, names what it asks the maker to give up, and comes with questions to test a design.



The Word

What do we put in front of people as God's word, or about it?

1. Keep the Word distinct, and teach it truly
2. Never speak for God



The person

How do we receive the one holding the phone?

1. Design for the most vulnerable first
2. Welcome before you ask, and guard what is told in confidence



The practice

What do we ask of their time, attention and money, and when do we stop?

1. Feed the flock, not on it
2. Make room for rest, and say when it is enough



The people

Where do we send them, and what do we claim to have grown?

1. Send people to God and to one another
2. Plant and water; leave the growth to God



The makers

Who are we becoming as we build?

1. Make it well, as an offering
2. Hold it with joy and trembling, before God and others

All ten, with their derivations, tensions and questions

Four practices for a team

Principles become faithful products through the habits of the people who make them. These four practices are adapted, with gratitude, from FaithTech's Lament, Discern, Build and Steward, ([FaithTech](#)) and made specific to spiritual formation apps. They form a cycle: what we learn as stewards sends us back to lament.

Lament

We draw near to the people most likely to be hurt before we decide anything.

THE TEMPTATION

Spiritual formation apps are usually built by people for whom faith is going well. The temptation is to design for the confident, engaged reader and patch the edges later: the grieving, the doubting, the scrupulous, the person hurt by a church, the child, the one awake in the middle of the night.

THE WAY OF JESUS

Jesus wept with those who wept and let himself be interrupted. Job's friends got one thing right: "they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights, but no one spoke a word to him, because they saw how intense his suffering was" (Job 2:13). "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15).

THE PRACTICE

1. **Listen.** Talk with people at their most fragile in faith, and with those who care for them: pastors, counsellors, safeguarding leads. Ask what an app has done to them, not only for them.
2. **Read it as them.** Read every screen, notification and AI answer aloud as someone grieving, someone in a hard night, someone the Bible has been used against.
3. **Name it.** Write down plainly where your product, or products like it, have spoken for God, counted devotion, charged at the door, kept people from people or told them only what they wanted to hear.
4. **Confess and give thanks.** Bring what you found to God together, and give thanks for what has been good. Lament is not delay for its own sake; it is how a team stops assuming its first idea is God's answer.

BEFORE MOVING ON, THE TEAM CAN ANSWER

- Whose pain have we heard directly, not through a persona or a dashboard?
- Which of the five temptations is closest to what we already do?
- Who is the most vulnerable person likely to use this, and what will they see first?

AN EXERCISE

The hard-night read-through. Install your app on a fresh phone. As someone who has just lost a child, or who types in the first box that they don't want to be here anymore, go through the first minutes and every message the app sends. Time how long it takes to reach a person. Write one paragraph to that person explaining what you will change.

Worked out on this site: [When Scripture is used to harm](#) · [Sensitive conversations](#) · [First use](#) · [Notifications](#)

Discern

We ask who should speak here before we ask how to build it.

THE TEMPTATION

Because an AI can answer anything, it is tempting to let it answer everything; because a feature can be built, it is tempting to build it. In a faith app the first question is not whether we can build it, but whose voice belongs in this moment.

THE WAY OF JESUS

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). Elijah found that the LORD was not in the wind, the earthquake or the fire, but in “a still, small voice” (1 Kings 19:12).

THE PRACTICE

1. **Ask who should speak.** For each moment, choose deliberately: the text itself, the church's words (a psalm, a collect, a creed), a person (a pastor, a friend, a counsellor, a helpline), a machine that says what it is and shows its sources, or silence.
2. **Consider the four responses.** FaithTech asks teams to Reject, Receive, Reimagine or Create, and to ask first: “Should a technology product be the solution?” ([FaithTech](#)) For a faith app, receiving often means the church's own words and practices.
3. **Discern together.** Pray, read Scripture, and invite those most affected, a theologian from outside your tradition and a safeguarding lead into the decision. No one should carry it alone.
4. **Decide what would make you stop.** Write down the sign that would show the feature is speaking for God, counting souls, charging at the door, standing in for a person or only telling people what they want to hear.

BEFORE MOVING ON, THE TEAM CAN ANSWER

- Who should speak in this moment, and why not the others?
- What does this feature do when someone is in danger, or asks it to pray for them?

- Which temptation could this feature fall into, and what would tell us it has?

AN EXERCISE

Three answers. Take a hard question people really ask, such as whether God can forgive what they did. Write what the text alone offers, what a person would say, and what an AI would answer. Decide which belongs in your product, in what order, and what the AI must never say.

Worked out on this site: [AI persona](#) · [Citations in AI answers](#) · [Questions for discernment](#) · [Prayer](#)

Build

We build with excellence, in dependence on God, with the right people in the room.

THE TEMPTATION

Once the roadmap is set, faith becomes a review at the end, if at all: theology checked after launch, safeguarding as a policy page, and the product's many small voices written by whoever had time.

THE WAY OF JESUS

Moses would not move without God: "If Your Presence does not go with us," Moses replied, "do not lead us up from here" (Exodus 33:15). God filled Bezalel "with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of craftsmanship" (Exodus 31:3). "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

THE PRACTICE

1. **Pray before you plan.** FaithTech's teams put it simply: "pray before you prompt". ([FaithTech](#)) Begin each stage by reading Scripture together and naming the people you serve.
2. **Make it well, as an offering.** Accessibility, translations with their character, sources at the claim, crisis help that works: craft is how we love the person on the other side of the screen.
3. **Audit every voice.** Every sentence your product speaks is a voice in someone's devotion. Know who wrote it and whether you would sign it.
4. **Pause for review.** At set points, put the work in front of people who can say no: a theologian, a pastor, a safeguarding lead, a clinician for anything that touches mental health, and someone from the community you serve.

BEFORE MOVING ON, THE TEAM CAN ANSWER

- Where did we invite God into this work, and where did we leave him out?
- Who outside the team reviewed the theology, the safeguarding and the crisis paths?
- What did we give up so that the product stays faithful?

AN EXERCISE

The voice audit. List every sentence your app speaks in the first person, in God's name, or with urgency: onboarding, notifications, empty states, paywalls, AI system prompts. Mark who wrote each one and whether you would put your own name under it. Rewrite or remove the rest.

Worked out on this site: [Notifications](#) · [Actions on AI answers](#) · [Keep the Word distinct](#) · [The decision worksheet](#)

Steward

We tend what we release, tell the truth about its fruit, and say when it is enough.

THE TEMPTATION

Launches are celebrated; tending is not. It is tempting to measure success by growth, to present use as spiritual fruit, and to keep a product asking for more long after its work is done.

THE WAY OF JESUS

God put the man in the garden “to cultivate and keep it”, and the faithful servant hears, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things” (Matthew 25:21). When the people brought more than was needed for the tabernacle, Moses “sent a proclamation throughout the camp” and “the people were restrained from bringing more” (Exodus 36:6).

THE PRACTICE

1. **Tend.** Keep crisis numbers verified, answer reports of harm, fix what fails, and support the people who carry the work.
2. **Examine honestly.** Measure what serves people and the task, such as understanding, burden and harm, never a score of anyone's soul. Ask people where they went when they closed the app.
3. **Testify truthfully.** Tell what has been good and what has gone wrong, without claiming the growth. “I planted the seed and Apollos watered it, but God made it grow” (1 Corinthians 3:6).
4. **Say when it is enough.** Stop asking when a need is met, let quiet hours be quiet, and let a feature or a product end when its work is done.

BEFORE MOVING ON, THE TEAM CAN ANSWER

- What fruit do we see in people, and what harm, and how do we know?
- Who is responsible for tending this over time?
- What would we stop, end or give away if faithfulness required it?

AN EXERCISE

The walk-away test. Install the app on a test phone, use it once and leave it for two weeks. Log everything it sends, how urgent it claims to be and what it says about the person's absence. Then ask three real users where your app sent them last month: to Scripture, to prayer, to a church, to a friend, or back to the app.

Worked out on this site: [Progress and streaks](#) · [Giving and offerings](#) · [Plant and water; leave the growth to God](#)

The deep dives

Each deep dive takes one design decision and lays its real options side by side, with a working example, research, examples from real apps and an exercise. Start from the temptation you are most exposed to.

Temptation	Principles	Deep dives
<u>The borrowed voice</u>	<u>Never speak for God</u> <u>Keep the Word distinct, and teach it truly</u>	<u>AI persona</u> <u>Citations in AI answers</u> <u>Notifications</u>
<u>The scoreboard of the soul</u>	<u>Plant and water; leave the growth to God</u> <u>Feed the flock, not on it</u> <u>Make room for rest, and say when it is enough</u>	<u>Progress and streaks</u> <u>Reading plans</u> <u>Check-ins and assessments</u>
<u>The toll at the temple door</u>	<u>Feed the flock, not on it</u> <u>Welcome before you ask, and guard what is told in confidence</u> <u>Never speak for God</u>	<u>Giving and offerings</u> <u>First use</u>
<u>The counsellor without a person</u>	<u>Design for the most vulnerable first</u> <u>Send people to God and to one another</u> <u>Welcome before you ask, and guard what is told in confidence</u>	<u>Sensitive conversations</u> <u>What an AI remembers</u> <u>Sharing with a group</u>
<u>Itching ears</u>	<u>Keep the Word distinct, and teach it truly</u> <u>Send people to God and to one another</u>	<u>Citations in AI answers</u> <u>Check-ins and assessments</u> <u>Finding a passage</u>

All deep dives

From teams who practise this

To come. This guide will carry short accounts from teams building Bible, prayer, AI and soul-care apps: a feature they did not build, a voice they rewrote, a metric they stopped showing. We have not gathered them yet, and we will not invent them. If your team has a story, tell us.

A review circle

To come. This is a draft by one editor. Before it is more than that, it needs readers who can say no: theologians across Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions, including Pentecostal voices; pastors; safeguarding leads; and clinicians for everything that touches Christian counselling and mental health. Their names will be listed here, with what each reviewed.

Sources and their limits

All sources

- FaithTech, The FaithTech Playbook 2.0, “The Way of Technology”
A general theology and practice of technology from a global community of Christian builders, not written for spiritual formation apps in particular.
- FaithTech, The FaithTech Playbook 2.0, “A Way of Building Redemptively”
The four practices (Lament, Discern, Build, Steward) adapted here; written for any product, not only faith apps.
- Praxis, “Redemptive entrepreneurship”: exploitative, ethical and redemptive ways to build
A venture organisation’s framework; the three ways are a teaching device, not a research finding.
- Cam Pak, “6 Guardrails for AI Apps for Christians”, faith.tools (updated 24 July 2026)
One directory’s published rules, from inside the faith-app community.
- Barna Group, “AI is becoming a spiritual authority, even among practicing Christians” (19 May 2026)
Online surveys of US adults, practicing Christians and pastors; self-reported trust and concern, not behaviour.
- Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and Dicastery for Culture and Education, Antiqua et nova (28 January 2025)
A Catholic doctrinal note on AI and human intelligence; other traditions would put some things differently.
- Julian De Freitas, Zeliha Oğuz-Uğuralp and Ahmet Kaan-Uğuralp, “Emotional Manipulation by AI Companions”, Harvard Business School working paper (2025)
Companion apps in general, not faith apps; a working paper.
- Mozilla Foundation, “Top mental health and prayer apps fail spectacularly at privacy, security” (May 2022)
A consumer review of published privacy policies at one point in time.
- Lausanne Theology Working Group, A Statement on the Prosperity Gospel (2010)
A statement from evangelical theologians, mostly from Africa; it also affirms a biblical vision of flourishing.
- FaithTech, The FaithTech Playbook 2.0, “A Way of Being Redemptive”
The three postures across power, person and purpose; general technology.
- Mrinank Sharma and colleagues (Anthropic), “Towards Understanding Sycophancy in Language Models” (2023, revised 2025)
Research on general AI assistants and their training, not on faith apps.

- Myra Cheng and colleagues (Stanford), “Sycophantic AI Decreases Prosocial Intentions and Promotes Dependence” (arXiv preprint, October 2025; since published in Science, 2026, doi:10.1126/science.aec8352)

Quoted from the preprint; the published version reports the figure as 49%. Advice about interpersonal conflicts, not faith; eleven general-purpose models.

- Tobias Treppmann, “Digital Spiritual Formation in Post-Christian Europe: The Aperto Vision”, Kairos academic paper (2026)

The editor’s own research paper on AI and apps for spiritual formation; unpublished.

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Scripture quotations are from the Berean Standard Bible (public domain). The four practices are adapted from the FaithTech Playbook 2.0, and the three ways from Praxis’s Redemptive Frame; the readings for spiritual formation apps are ours. Examples link to dated screenshots on this site.