

I Have Spiritual Questions

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I Can't Believe What I Used to Believe

A common feeling in these moments is some level of disillusionment and betrayal.

You may feel that you've been hoodwinked. You might feel a sense of injustice. You, or your loved one, did what was right. She regularly went to worship services. He exercised and ate right. She's good and kind and never spoke a nasty word about anyone. I'm too young. My kids are too young. *This isn't how the world is supposed to work.*

Giving voice to these feelings of outrage may be helpful, but you may find it difficult to find someone who is able to hear your anger without trying to talk you out of it. Your pain may frighten them, and they may shush you, tell you there's a plan to the world that we cannot ever understand. They may be right, but their reactions may not be helpful to you in the moment. A counselor can be a useful confidant in times like this: counselors understand the position of faith from which you have begun, and are prepared to bear witness to your anger. They will not try to dissuade you from feeling your feelings, but they will accompany you through them.



But There is Still Goodness

While some find the experience of spiritual pain disorienting, and cause to doubt that there is any goodness in the world, you may find yourself experiencing the exact opposite.

In the midst of tragedy, many experience goodness they never thought possible. Sometimes it is existential: the feeling of strong arms embracing you while you wept one night, an inner peace in the mist of chaos, or a sense of the synchronicity of things. Sometimes, the experience is much more tangible: the timely arrival of a dear friend, a nurse or hospital staff member being extraordinarily kind, and reconciliation between estranged family members. These feelings do not diminish the loss and grief you may be feeling, but they may give you a different perspective. And if your different perspective is not shared by your loved ones, you may find yourself struggling to reconcile the two. Here again, you may find it helpful to speak with a counselor – a person not directly involved who nonetheless can understand the vastness of feelings you are experiencing.



Me and God, We're...?

Amazingly, even if you never described yourself as particularly religious – even if you never once considered the presence or absence or temperament of God – you may find yourself thinking thoughts about God pretty frequently these days.

Perhaps this experience is, for you, definitive proof of the nonexistence of God. Perhaps it is just as definitive proof of God's existence and benevolence. Perhaps, however, this experience raises more questions than answers. Perhaps you're furious at God. *Am I even allowed to be furious at God?!* If you are a member of a particular faith community, you may find a conversation with your religious leader to be helpful during this time. He or she can help you understand exactly what your tradition teaches about how one should deal with anger towards God. You may also like to speak with one of our counselors.



Seriously?! The Last Thing I Want is a 'God Person' Preaching at Me

It's true that if you're angry with God, the idea of talking to a person whose role is explicitly religious may not be appealing. A professional counselor will neither lecture nor judge. They will, however, listen, and a good listener may be hard to find if your loved ones are also grieving and struggling to make sense of things.



God, I'm Fine With. But These People...!

OK, so you're right in the midst of the worst experience of your life, and to add insult to injury, the people you thought you could depend on are being colossally unhelpful. It happens all the time. With friends, congregations, neighbors, coworkers, family members.

True fact #1: people are going to say unhelpful things to you.

True fact #2: people are going to do unhelpful things for you, thinking they are helping.

Here's what's really going on: you're sick, or your loved one is sick, or someone has died. That has turned your world upside down. And, like the ripples from a stone thrown into the water, your tragedy has reverberated into the lives of those around you. It makes them sad for you. It makes them frightened. It makes them feel guilty about their own happy, healthy lives. It makes them want desperately to help you and make everything all better again. It makes them lose their minds just a little bit, and say stupid things in an effort to make you feel better.

And so your well-meaning neighbor says, "God must have needed another angel." And your coworkers decorate your cubicle with pink breast cancer ribbons. And your cousins – all fifteen of them – each bring tuna noodle casseroles to your house. And the people in your church/synagogue/mosque/temple/elsewhere smile and don't ask how you're doing.

If you know what you need, it's completely OK to tell people. In fact, it will probably be a relief for them. Your cousins, congregation members, and coworkers want to do something, and they're probably all struggling with what to do, or whether just to give you your space. So if there's something that you need, or something you need them to stop doing, try telling them.

If, as is very likely, you have no idea what you need, that's OK. The truth is, they don't know what you need, and neither do you. You may know in the moment, though: as soon as you see all those pink ribbons, you might know that that is the last thing you need. And it's completely ok to say that. Even if you're a bit gruff about it. Just say, "Thanks, but I just can't look at all those right now." And if you need to talk, pull a friend aside and say, "I need to talk." And if, just as quickly, you can't bear to talk about it, tell your friend, "I can't talk about it right now." Your needs are likely to change as quickly as your emotions.

Counselors are standing by who will listen without judgment as you make sense of what you need.

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