



# Spiritual Questions

**The diagnosis of a serious or life-limiting illness can raise questions about death – and the first question is usually ‘why?’**

Giving yourself time to understand and reflect on what gives meaning – in your life, the life of your loved ones or in general – is an important part of dying well.

## Big questions about death

None of us likes to think about death, and that isn't necessarily bad.

Our every heartbeat blocks out death, pushes it away, and keeps us focused on living. That's nature and God working. And this denial of death stems too from the fact that, in the end, we don't die, don't become extinct, but move on to deeper life. At some level, we already know that, sense it, feel it, and live life in the face of it. To want to think about death

can be as much a sign of depression or illness as of depth. Pushing away thoughts of death is normally a sign of health.

But there are times when faith asks us to look death in the eye. Classically, the churches have asked us to do that at the beginning of Autumn; as the seasons change we see a lot of death going on in nature and we see light itself diminishing as the days grow shorter and there is less and less sunlight.

The Book of Maccabees says that it's a healthy thing to pray for the dead and the Church tells us that, every so often, it's healthy too to think about death, both by remembering those who have died and by contemplating the reality and certainty of our own deaths.

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## Exploring the meaning of Life

It's a question that's been asked since life began – What is the meaning of life?

We are fired into life with a madness that comes from the gods. So say the Greek Stoics. They are right. Our whole life is simply a search to respond to that divine madness inside us, a madness Christians identify with infinite yearnings of the soul.

Victor Frankl, the author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, was lucky. He had been clinically dead for a few minutes and then revived by doctors. When he returned to his ordinary life after this, everything suddenly became very rich: "One very important aspect of post-mortem life is that everything gets precious, gets piercingly important. You get stabbed by things, by flowers and by babies and by beautiful things – just the very act of living, of walking and breathing and eating and having friends and chatting. Everything seems to look more beautiful rather than less, and one gets the much-intensified sense of miracles."

The secret to prayer is not to try to make God present, but to make ourselves present to God. The secret to finding beauty and love in life is basically the same. Like God, they are already present. The trick is to make ourselves present to them. Rarely are we enough inside of our own skins, present enough to the moment, and sensitive enough to the richness that is already present in our lives. Our experience comes brimming with riches, but too often we are not enough inside of it. The trick is to come home. God and the moment don't have to be searched out and found. They're already here. We need to be here.

## How do we search for God?

What do we naturally search for in life? By nature, we search for meaning, love, a soulmate, friendship, emotional connection, sexual fulfillment, significance, recognition, knowledge, creativity, play, humour, and pleasure. However, we tend not to see these pursuits as searching for God. In pursuing these things, we rarely, if ever, see them in any conscious way as our way of searching for God. In our minds, we are simply looking for happiness, meaning, fulfillment, and pleasure, and our search for God is something we need to do in another way, more consciously through explicit religious practices. This can be a misunderstanding of God's ways. Our normal search for meaning, fulfillment, and even for pleasure, is in fact our search for God.

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