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## Listening to Our Questions

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## Listening to Our Questions

Children often ask "Why?" They are curious, and want to learn. Though we have learned much over the years, we still retain some curiosity. But many of our questions arise from more than a desire for information. We want to know what we are to do, and how we are to proceed, where we are going, when, and with whom. We ask questions of one another, and we ask many things of God.

We are capable of reflection, even about our questions. We can notice whether we have stated a question in a final form, or have posed it as still tentative. In asking a question, even of ourselves, we might be musing about something of minor interest, such as which pair of shoes to wear, or a matter of deep concern, about which oncologist to consult. Some questions are more important to us than others.

We can listen to our questions, and perhaps find out that we are engaged in a process, obtaining information incrementally, so that our next question will be more focused. We obtain not only the immediate answers to our questions, but we also become aware of what it is that we really seek. For example, we might ask a friend for advice about traveling to another location, and become aware from the tentative manner of asking, that we are more concerned about our relationship with the person than we are about gaining information about a place on the map. We might, as a result of our instantaneous evaluation, re-state our question, directing it more towards our friend's opinion than about obtaining directions. When we ask questions, we can receive answers, and we can also learn something about our dispositions and the level of concern that underlies our questions.

When we ask questions of God, we need to listen carefully not only to the inspired thoughts that often come to mind as answers, but to our questions. God can relate directly with us through the words we use in our questions as much or sometimes more than in separate "answers." Rather than a one-time question and a one-time answer, we might find that we are led to re-formulate our question so that we ask again, more fully expressing our desire. We might decide to pray for someone, and in the process of relating to God our concern for another's well-being, we find our hearts getting more involved. We might start out like the child, asking, "Why does my friend have to suffer," and recognize that the question comes from sincere affection. We might then ask that our love and God's love coincide for the benefit of our friend. As the Spirit guides us in listening to our own questions, we find – if we do not close off the dialog – that we modify

our questions, so that they become more in keeping with our relationship with God as creator and lover of all persons.

God moves in our hearts even in framing our original questions, and then draws us to engage our trust and love more deeply as we hear what we say. If we choose to allow God to work with us in a conversation that includes our questions, we will come to understand and appreciate our deeper desires, and give them ever more honest and direct expression. But if we treat our questions of God as though we were querying a computer database, expecting only the information we want, we might receive nothing. The God of loving surprises is not bound to answer our questions in a linear fashion, especially if we do not really know or appreciate what we are asking. God, who knows and loves us and all of creation, responds to questions that are framed in at least some level of trust and respect.

Listening to our questions is a means of encountering God.