



Get Comfortable With the Questions

Once a year, usually around the Fourth of July holiday or the long Thanksgiving Day weekend, we'd all pile into our old family station-wagon and head out from our home in western Pennsylvania for the woods of central Connecticut. We were off and traveling to see our Grammy and Grampy Reeves, grandparents on my mother's side of the family. It was hard to contain the excitement of five eager children. Our visits were a rare and cherished treat, and both the trip and the time together were treasures we truly looked forward to.

Grammy and Grampy Reeves split most of their years living in two places—the school years living in New York City and the summers in upstate Connecticut. As the lead chaplain at New York's Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, Grampy Reeves carried a constant and challenging responsibility for all things “spiritual” at the hospital. Whether praying with those who were sick and facing the fear of uncertain outcomes or comforting those who'd just lost a loved one, Grampy Reeves had his emotional plate full. He loved the times when he could retreat from the demands of his job and the busyness of the big city around him and return to the quiet of his country Connecticut home.

At least, it was a quiet home until we all showed up! Five young children, hyper from being cooped up in the car for five hours and overjoyed with excitement to see them, we'd burst through their front doors and invade poor

Grammy and Grampy's home like an unbridled force of nature. Running upstairs and then down, inside and then out, from the garage to the living room—we'd unpack the car and all talk at once as we competed for their waning attention. I now understand completely why both of them needed a mid-afternoon nap not long after our arrival.

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I remember one visit in particular. I'd reached that tender age where I was asking questions continually—questions about Grampy's work, questions about our family, questions about the world and life and why bad things seemed to happen all the time.

I remember Grampy trying to field my questions graciously, answering them to a level he felt was appropriate for me. But, as I continued further, digging a little deeper with each follow-up question, he stopped suddenly at one point and looked sternly at me. “Get comfortable with the questions, Ed, get comfortable with the questions.”

“What do you mean by that, Grampy?” I, of course, had to ask.

“Life does not give us many answers, Ed,” he continued. “As a result, we just have to get comfortable with the questions.” I've never forgotten his thought.

To ask questions is only human. Whether we relate to William Shakespeare in *Hamlet* when he

asked the questions of *Who* and *How* with, “To be, or not to be: that is the question,” or to Rabbi Harold S. Kushner when he asked *Why* in his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, we all feel the deep need to ask the big questions of God and of life from time to time. We are not alone. David Hayward in his book, *Questions are The Answer*, writes, “Jesus asked twice as many questions as he answered.” Many of the questions he asked pertained to the *Who* of his identity and the *What* and *Why* of the Law. These are big questions, indeed. I'd say that's good company for us to keep.

So much of the wisdom literature we read in the Bible is all about asking the big questions. King David, and others, fill the Psalms with impassioned questions of God and of life. Job may well have been a man who asked every *Who*, *What*, *Why*, *When*, *Where* and *How* question of God one could. Again, these biblical characters offer us good company.

Although our spiritual lives, our lives in Christ Jesus, need not be questioned, our physical lives can be full of uncertainty and unexpected outcomes. We suffer and often ask, *Why?* That's just life. As an old Chinese proverb states: “A man who asks questions is a fool for five minutes. A man who never asks is a fool for life.”

Personally, I'd rather ask the questions. To “get comfortable with the questions” as my Grampy advised many years ago is to have a conversation with God. And, that's the best company of all. □

—Ed Dunn