

Most traditional and evangelical churches don't like to talk about it a lot, but the reality is that churches have done lots of damage to lots of lives for a long time. The list of damages is long. Frankly, that's probably true for most institutions in general. It's hard to gain a large footprint and not manage to step on people as you attempt to move forward. It's hard, but it's not really excusable and there is always room for improvement.

I think one of the more quietly damaging things the institutionalized Church has done over the years is to teach us that asking questions is bad, or at least asking investigative questions is bad. Feel free to ask the priest, vicar, pastor or minister what a particular story means, but it's practically blasphemy to ask why it couldn't mean something else. As a matter of fact, the institutionalized Church has a long history of telling us not to ask too many questions. Us? We are told to trust in the traditional translations. We are told to learn and repeat the confessions even if we don't agree with what they are saying. Doing otherwise is dangerous – doing otherwise shows a lack of faith. Or, so we are told.

As a matter of fact, I now try to minimize my use of the word "faith." Colloquially, it has become the near equivalent of "blind belief." And, "blind belief?" That's just churchy language for "I wanna believe what I wanna believe." Me? I've got no use for that. That kind of thinking (or should I say lack of thinking?) leads to gullibility and a spiritually shallow life. It has nothing substantial to stand on and falls down time and time again when it is put up to the challenges of life and what spirituality looks like in tough times. It cannot sustain you and it certainly cannot grow you spiritually. It just leaves you stuck in the quagmire that someone else created in order to control you and your perspective. Or as Saint Thomas Aquinas said, "Clearly the person who accepts the church as an infallible guide will believe whatever the church teaches."

Personally, I prefer the old Chinese proverb that says, "He who asks a question is a fool for five minutes; he who does not ask a question remains a fool forever."

We should want to ask questions, to grow in our faith. We should be innovative in our thinking rather than traditional. That is not to say we should ignore the traditional thinking. Frequently, it is an excellent place to start, but we should not get stuck in a space and a place that used antiquated thinking, antiquated information, and antiquated tools to arrive at its conclusions. To grow, we must be innovative. To be innovative we must ask questions. That's what helps us develop in, and advance, our spirituality.

It's interesting to consider that the one group who probably shares with the world's leading innovators a willingness to question everything is children. They learn through asking questions. Frankly, it's the simplest and most effective way of learning. Author Warren Berger in his book *"A More Beautiful Question,"* says that children from ages 2 to 5 ask roughly 40,000 questions. Unfortunately, for most of us, as we progress through school and grow into adulthood, the number of questions we ask drops off dramatically.

It would seem that as we get older we somehow forget this oh-so-important lesson of asking questions. Sometimes, sadly, it is even taught out of us. From, school curriculum to the blind faith of institutionalized churches, we are typically encouraged to memorize and regurgitate someone else's "knowledge" rather than develop our own. We learn answers rather than how to ask good questions. Interestingly, nowadays, it is very easy to find answers – nowadays, answers are practically a dime a dozen. With the aid of laptops, smartphones, and smart home products like Amazon Echo and Google Home, we can quickly get the answer to almost any question even when we personally have very little to no knowledge on the subject whatsoever. It seems to me that this instant access to "answers" makes critical thinking skills and the ability to ask good questions possibly more important than they have ever been. The bottom line is that knowing how to ask good questions is much more important than knowing the answers. Asking good questions helps us form our own beliefs and our own opinions instead of mindlessly adopting them from other people.

Here's the thing, not asking good or even enough questions has a direct impact on the quality of choices we make. And, not making good choices in our spiritual lives is not just unfortunate, it can impact the health with which we move through life. Learning and practicing the art of asking questions helps us gain deep insight, develop more innovative solutions, and arrive at better decision-making.

Spirituality attempts to help us understand who we are and what we are to be within this grand experiment we call life. It attempts to lead us into being our best selves. To guide us in making the most positive impact we can in every moment of our lives. To play the best role we can in making lives better and Creation better. To recognize our universal connectedness. To capture glimpses of the thing we call God.

I don't know about you, but while that may sound kind of beautiful, if I stop to think about it for a moment, it can be pretty overwhelming. I mean, that is a MASSIVE undertaking. There is simple NO WAY I can do that with what I know now.

Which is where asking questions comes in...

The brilliant thinkers of the world will tell you that, much more frequently than starting with the known “answers,” it is asking the right questions (and frequently they are simple questions) that almost always starts the process which leads to great breakthroughs.

If we want real breakthroughs in our lives, professionally or spiritually, we need to learn to embrace some uncertainty if we hope for creative answers to emerge. I mean, isn't life itself one of the most amazing creative processes you have ever participated in? So, what if discovering and living out your purpose has much less to do with defining it and much more to do with letting it emerge slowly? It seems to me that most natural creative processes work that way. Part of our job is to create a nurturing environment for it and allow divine mystery to express itself.

One of my favourite modern scientists is a theoretical physicist and a co-founder of string theory. His name is Michio Kaku. He says, “I have concluded that we are in a world made by rules created by an intelligence. To me, it is clear that we exist in a plan which is governed by rules that were created, shaped by a universal intelligence and not by chance.” He also says that in his own point of view, “you can neither prove nor disprove the existence of God.”

It's why I consider myself an agnostic Christian. It's also why I assert that when it comes to spirituality, expecting to have all the answers rather than learning to constantly ask and live in the questions is far worse than just folly, it the height of egoism and self-importance.

One of the challenges of the modern Church is the reality that the roots of most religions are in providing answers. For example, we have creation stories because people in that pre-scientific age wanted to know where we came from, so religion provided the “answers.” In our scientific age, we have to begin looking at the other “truths” that these sacred texts provide and be willing to ask questions of, and about, them. Not only that, we must begin considering the importance of experience as a paradigm shift away from answers rooted in the past and toward questions rooted not only in the present but in the future.

Being rooted in questions acknowledges our ultimate inability to “prove” God. It opens us up to blooms of creative, spiritual insight, and innovation. It frees us from the oppressive need to be “right” and opens us to the experience of just “being.” Not only that, but in knowing that we do not have all the answers, it should also open us to the possibility that others may have perspectives that could help us – whether they come from a different belief tradition or no belief tradition at all. It should open us up to dialogues we may have otherwise avoided – dialogue that may grow us in ways we never dreamt of.

It might even open us up to the reality that no one way of growing is the right way to grow. That we all are growing in the same garden, in the same soil, nourished by the same earth.

I'll conclude with something Austrian poet and novelist Rainier Maria Rilke once said, “Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”