Spirituality
Soul Seeing



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First, my friend quoted the question Jesus asked of Peter: "Who do you say I am?" Then, he suggested that I pose the same question to Jesus about myself: "But who do you say that I am, Lord?"

This blew my mind. It required openness, vulnerability and a sense of intrigue. No one has the total answer.

Sometimes I think I know the answer on my own, but I am called to ask Jesus: "Who do you say I am, Lord?" And, then I ask myself, "What must I do now to live accordingly?" To answer these two questions, I have found that I need the support of four types of healthy friends and time in silence and solitude each day.

There is an old saying: "A friend knows the song in your heart and can sing it back to you when you have forgotten how it goes." In our circle of friends, we need the prophet who asks, "What voices are really guiding you?" We need the cheerleader who encourages us, as well as the harasser who teases us when we take ourselves, rather than God, too seriously. Finally, we need an inspirational voice that calls us to be all we can be without embarrassing us about where we are now.

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Once, when I was presenting a talk on resilience in Cambodia to helpers and healers after the Khmer Rouge had been pushed north, a Buddhist nun approached me. "Doctor, do you have a moment?" she asked.

"For you, Sister, of course! How may I help?" She then spoke of a young Buddhist chaplain working in the hospital unit for farmers who had their legs blown off by landmines. He was understandably depressed, and she asked me what she could do to help him.

After a few seconds of silence, I asked, "Well, Sister, when the day is over and he meditates for a few moments before driving back to the temple, what comes up in his consciousness? Knowing this will allow me to respond in a more helpful way."

She stared at me, surprised, then said, "Doctor, I am so embarrassed. I am a Buddhist nun, and I failed to ask him about his meditation."

Whenever I ask people — including physicians, nurses, psychologists, educators and social workers — if they are reflective persons who consider their lives carefully, most respond affirmatively. Yet few of us truly value times of silence and solitude in quiet gratitude for our lives.

Spending only a couple of minutes each day on a regular basis to breathe, be thankful and allow our thoughts to surface so we can examine them clearly and kindly can change our lives. Taking a breath for a few quiet moments each day, smiling and having compassion for ourselves — while forgiving others who are doing the best they can — is a life changer. It’s like being still and sitting by the quiet water of life with a twinkle in our eyes.

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It is with such an attitude of openness in meditation, and in receiving feedback from a healthy circle of friends, that we can better receive a response to the question we need to continually ask the Lord: "Who do you say that I am?"

I have learned that we must be willing to forgive ourselves for the times when we are ego-centered and trip over the gift God has given us for helping others. I find that when I endeavor to inspire others, I sometimes come across as intrusive instead. However, even when I fail, I try to understand it as a time when I am called to learn rather than be defensive and project blame or beat myself up.

In reading Scripture, the call is not for intellectual knowledge but for spiritual self-identification. As theologian Karl Barth notes, "When we read the Bible and ask, 'What is this book saying?' we should hear in return, 'Who is it that is asking?' " We need friends who are prophets, cheerleaders, gentle harassers and inspirational voices to help us find the true name God has given us, and we need prayerful solitude to know what this means in living out our identity at each turn in life.

Jesus is the friend who knows the song in our heart and sings it back to us when we have forgotten how it goes.

"Who do you say I am, Lord?"