



Consider the five ways Chaplain Maxwell says people are “spiritual.” (If you can’t remember, see p. 10 of “Do You Feel Different Inside?”) Can you think of any other ways people are spiritual? In what one or more of these five ways (if any) are you spiritual?



Most people view death through the lens of the first death they encountered in their life. Consider the first death you encountered personally, and look at what you see as its key characteristics: Shockingly sudden or long anticipated? “Too soon” or “after a good long life?” Marked by lengthy suffering or apparently painless? A great loss for you or a relatively insignificant event for you personally? Loudly mourned or the subject of grown-up whispers in corners from which you were excluded?



Recall the most recent death that affected you personally. Did it have any characteristics like the first death you encountered? If so, did those characteristics hold your attention more powerfully than its other attributes?



Read again “My Parents’ Fault” (pp. 53-56). What do you think of Ms. Pomfret’s claim that she doesn’t have any receptors in her brain for information about God and that this lack is her parents’ fault? Do you agree or disagree with parents who decline to give their children any religious education, saying they want their children to “be free to make up their own minds”?



In the story “Ms. Trouten’s Pillow” (pp. 75-81), the medical team tells the patient’s brother that the morphine needed to help control the patient’s pain has a small risk of further lowering her already low blood pressure, but “at this point it was a risk worth taking.” Do you agree or disagree that, if the patient consents, it is all right to take a small but real risk of death to relieve severe pain? How about taking a big risk of death to relieve severe pain?



Can you recall the five things Soul Support says we need to do before we die if we have the time to do them (pp. 37-38)? Are there any other things you think everyone should do, if they can, before they die?



The author says in "About This Book" (pp. ix-x) that she is "by nature a private person and not inclined to self-revelation." But she is remarkably open about normally private matters, including her mother's death and some of her own spiritual experiences, as well as her private thoughts while she was working with specific patients. Why do you suppose she did that? Did her openness make a difference in your enjoyment of Soul Support? Why or why not?



In several stories, including "At the Foot of the Bed" (pp. 58-61) and "Witch Doctor" (pp. 169-175), the author refers to the contrast between scientists who are atheists (people who do not believe in God or what Maxwell calls "the Mystery") and other scientists who do believe. Do you think that a scientist can believe in God/the Mystery and still be a scientist? Do you think spirituality and science can be reconciled?



Maxwell writes often about prayer and praying, including in "God and Me (1)," "God and Me (2)," "Ms. Trouten's Pillow," "The Little Space," "Praying, Out Loud," "Ash Wednesday," "Ms. Doka with Shining Eyes," "Mr. Rupert's Blessing," "Under the Pillow," "Five Minutes," "Permanent Ink," "Exorcism," "I know that Prayer!" "Psalm 88," and "Maria, Full of Grace." Sometimes the prayers are spoken out loud and sometimes the prayer is silent, sometimes without any words at all. What do you feel about these different forms of prayer? Do you think that the kind of God/Mystery presupposed by one form is different from the kind presupposed by another? Why or why not?



Soul Support recounts many surprising deathbed events, from a homeless man experiencing deep joy to a scientist seeing an invisible woman to a paralyzed woman moving her hand to blow a kiss. Which one did you find most striking? Did you find believable Maxwell's accounts of what happened? Have you personally witnessed or heard of remarkable deathbed events? What were they?