

# QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. One of the basic premises of *A Journey Home* is that our spiritual work proceeds layer by layer, from the most external forms of personality to the inner core of our being. We are like onions with many skins, and we must peel ourselves again and again to get at the real core.

Q: Do you agree? Do we all have those veils? Why is it so painful to tear off the veils?

2. Esteemed Franciscan monk and author Fr. Richard Rohr has said that a way to escape from the grip of our false ego-self is to create a gap between our inner observer and our personality. Dr. John's attachment to a self-image well ingrained from early childhood made this very challenging.

Q: Have you experienced moments where that gap has emerged in your life? What were the most significant challenges in this process?

3. Dr. John's third daughter and psychotherapist, Mary Lou Bonham, has said that we have two basic ways to meet our needs. One is through vulnerability and asking for help and support, and the other is through power and control. And she has said that, for Dr. John, vulnerability was not an option.

Q: Why is vulnerability so challenging for many of us? What strategies have you found to be effective for becoming more vulnerable?

4. The Enneagram suggests that the key defense mechanisms of an Enneatype Eight (which Dr. John was) are repression, displacement, and denial.

Q: How did repression, displacement, and denial show up in his life? How did they begin to dissolve over time? What defense mechanisms have you experienced in your life, and have they dissolved over time?

5. A major feature of Enneatype Eights is the attraction to extreme risk taking, the tendency to ignore real dangers in the quest for the feeling of being alive.

Q: In your opinion, what were the major drivers of this tendency in Dr. John's life? What approaches might be useful in moving beyond this tendency toward extreme risk?

6. For a long time, Dr. John avoided confronting his inner pain. In fact, many of us do our utmost to push down painful feelings.

Q: Do you believe it's always necessary to go through pain to resolve the unfinished business of childhood and heal, or are there other ways to heal?

7. Dr. John was a devout Christian who devoted his life to serving his Lord. And yet, in *A Journey Home*, he doesn't experience the full grace of God's love until nearly the end of his life journey.

Q: How do you think about the difference between the stern God Dr. John thought he could name and know, and the unknowable God of love and grace he experienced at the end?

8. In *A Journey Home*, Dr. John grew from judgment (of himself and others) to expanded awareness and then forgiveness.

Q: What is the role of awareness in your own journey toward forgiveness? In your experience, does expanded awareness move you toward forgiveness, or can it sometimes be counterproductive in that journey?

9. Pastor and poet Drew E. Jackson said in *This Unveiling*, "This is the pressing question of every age: What is it that we cannot see? For life is hiddenness, as is God, and we have been given the gift of searching."

Q: How does this relate to Dr. John's life? To your own?

10. Arthur C. Brooks, in *From Strength to Strength*, said we all have three possible responses to the decline that inevitably happens with age:

- a) Deny the facts and rage against the decline.
- b) Shrug and give in to decline; experience aging as an unavoidable tragedy.
- c) Accept that what got us to this point won't work in the future; focus on developing new strengths.

Q: How do these responses to decline relate to Dr. John's life? To your own?

11. "Never say you know the last word about the human heart," said novelist Henry James.

Q: How was it even possible for the authors of *A Journey Home* to trace Dr. John's inner journey? To what extent is his journey a universal one?

12. Dr. John's favorite Bible verse was Micah 6:8: "And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

Q: Of all the Bible verses he could have chosen as his favorite, why this one? How does it relate to the way Dr. John lived his life? Does it relate to the way you are living your life?