

What Do I Say?



# What Do I Say?

*Talking with Patients about Spirituality*

Elizabeth Johnston Taylor, Ph.D., R.N.

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*Dedication*

To my daughters . . .

Rilla Kathryn and Elissa Lynn  
. . . gracious gifts of God.

Thank you for teaching me as I learn how  
to talk with you about spirituality.



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What Do I Say?



# 1 Let's Begin!

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You've heard it:

“Why is this happening to me?”

“Am I dying? Am I going to be okay?”

“Why should I live? I'm just a burden to others.”

“If I just pray harder, a miracle will happen.”

“I did this to myself—I just can't forgive myself.”

Whether patients are expressing a need to make sense of tragedy, find hope for the future, ascribe purpose and worth to living, trust religious beliefs correlate to self and others with love, they are telling us about their inner spiritual needs. These needs are often deeply painful.

Such painful expressions of the human spirit often perplex and overwhelm the listener. This spiritual pain is often too hard to hear. Undoubtedly, when you have listened, you've heard patients—and even your friends and family—say things that left you wondering, “What do I say?”

This workbook will help you to answer this very question. In addition to providing you with suggestions for how to form healing verbal responses to expressions of spiritual pain, this workbook offers exercises for practicing and applying your newfound knowledge. Learning these communication skills are fundamental, but they will not be helpful unless you practice them. The adage “practice makes perfect” applies!