

SAMPLE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

An open-ended question is one that cannot be answered by a simple yes or no. It requires a thoughtful answer. The following questions vary in their level of difficulty, and some probe quite deeply. Some may be more appropriate as topics for meditation than for a written assignment where another's judgment is involved. When developing questions for group discussions, or written assignments, keep in mind your purpose. Is it to help people think more deeply about what they've read or to help them apply it to their lives, or to aid them in discerning their vocation?

What Are You Seeking?

1. How do the requirements of this way of life fit with your daily life?
2. Have you prayed the Divine Office before?
3. What are your feelings about this Carmelite community?
4. Are you familiar with any of the Carmelite Saints? If so, which ones?
5. How would you describe your relationship with Mary?
6. In coming to Carmel, what are you seeking?
7. What kinds of services are you giving to others, at this time?

Welcome to Carmel

1. What advantages do you experience in praying, daily, morning and evening prayer? Are you having any difficulties?
2. How often do you pray?
3. Has quiet and solitude found a place within your day?
4. What have you been led to read for your spiritual reading?
5. What do you find attractive in the Carmelite Spirituality as it is described in *Welcome to Carmel*?
6. How frequently do you participate in the Sacraments of the Church?

7. Do you foresee difficulties living this Carmelite way of life?

Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition
The Sources, Characteristics of Carmel, the Rule and Its Spirit

1. How do you see, feel, know or experience God in your life?
2. What does the call to detachment mean to you?
3. What is your understanding of Elijah's constant cry, "The Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand"? How does it apply to your life?
4. What does the word desert, as is described in the Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition, mean to you? How have you found life there?
5. As a Carmelite living in the world how are you able to find solitude?
6. In 'pondering the laws of the Lord day and night and watching at your prayers,' what do you watch for?
7. How is our Carmelite way of life like that of the Blessed Virgin Mary's daily life?

Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition
Teresa of Avila

1. What is your understanding of what it means to be a hermit?
2. What value do you place in silence?
3. What value do you place in solitude?
4. What value do you place in community?
5. What role does prayer play in your life?
6. What aspects of this Carmelite way of life most fills you, gives you life?
7. Describe your relationship with Teresa of Avila and her writings.

Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition
St. John of the Cross

1. How much time do you spend each day studying Scripture?

2. What portions of the Bible carry the most meaning for you at this time in your life?
3. “Those who wish to come after me, must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” What meaning does this have for you?
4. Where in your daily life do you see God?
5. Aside from the Eucharist, in what ways are you spiritually fed?
6. How do you hear God in your life?
7. Describe your relationship with St. John of the Cross and his writings.

Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition
St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face

1. What roles do the three persons of the Trinity play in your life?
2. Describe your trust in God’s providence.
3. What does humility in relationship to Therese’s “little way” mean to you?
4. In what ways do you see your soul bringing glory to God?
5. Therese tells us, “Merit does not consist in doing or in giving much, but rather in receiving, in loving much... .” How do you apply this to your life?
6. We are told to “Be still and know that I am God.” Through Therese’s little way, how do you understand this stillness?
7. Describe your relationship with St. Therese of the Child Jesus.

Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition
Carmelite prayer and contemplation

1. Describe how comfortable you are at being alone.
2. We are told by Christ to “... be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” How do you understand this perfection?
3. What does the term “meditation” mean to you?

4. What does the term “contemplation” mean to you?
5. What do you see as the goal or purpose of this prayerful way of life?
6. How do you understand the apostolic work of the Carmelite within the Church?
7. In Carmel, our Lady is seen as the “soul” in the presence of God. Describe your relationship to her as this model for life.

Way of Perfection
Chapters 1- 10

1. What do you see as the vocation of a Secular Carmelite?
2. St. Teresa of Avila calls poverty our insignia. In what ways do you practice poverty?
3. What do you see as the most important aspect of this way of life?
4. What aspects of this way of life keeps you coming to Carmel?
5. What things might keep you from living this way of life or attending monthly meetings?

Way of Perfection
Chapters 11-20

1. What does interior mortification mean to you?
2. Teresa says a true person of prayer who aims to enjoy the delights of God must not turn his back upon the desire to die for God and suffer martyrdom. What does this martyrdom mean to you?
3. Teresa asks us to “draw some benefit from your temptations.” She also tells us to study how to double our willingness to do things that go contrary to our nature. What acts have you found helpful in your life that allow you to gain freedom from temptations and a greater willingness to love and serve God in all that he asks of you in your daily life?
4. Teresa talks about having a holy daring. How do you view the idea of holiness?
5. What do you see as the purpose of prayer?

Way of Perfection
Chapters 21 - 30

1. What form of prayer do you find most beneficial to you at this time?
2. In Chapter 28 Teresa talks about where heaven is found. What is your view?
3. Teresa speaks of recollection and describes a recollected way of life. What has been your experience with recollected prayer?
4. How well do the humiliations and trials of daily life serve you?
5. In light of Teresa's statements in Chapter 29, Paragraph 7, how much of your day do you spend in God's presence speaking? How much of your day do you spend listening?

Way of Perfection
Chapters 31-42

1. In what ways do you seek to follow God's will in your life?
2. How do you understand Teresa's comments on suffering? (Chapter 32)
3. How do you understand justice?
4. In light of St. Teresa's comments in chapter 40 #7-10, how do you view penance?
5. The book is entitled Way of Perfection. How do you view perfection?

Introduction to the Rule of St. Albert

1. How do you understand "staying in your cell pondering the Lord's law?"
2. How does this way of life strengthen your family life? Your secular life?
3. What does mortification mean to you?
4. What benefits do you experience in a daily examination of conscience?
5. What pieces of the armor of God do you find difficult? What pieces do you find easy?
6. How do you understand the silence this life offers?

7. At what point in the six-year formation process do you feel a person should try to begin to live this way of life?

Introduction to the OCDS Constitutions

1. According to the Constitutions, to whom do we make our Promises?
2. What does the promise of poverty mean to you?
3. What does the promise of obedience mean to you?
4. What does the promise of chastity mean to you?
5. What does living a life of beatitude mean to you?
6. How comfortable are you at being alone for periods of time?
7. What is your understanding of simplicity, detachment and humility?

***Spiritual Canticle* Stanzas 1-10**

1. How do you view God's love for you?
2. Through this Carmelite way of life, what are you seeking?
3. Where do you find it most?
4. "Faith and love are like the blind person's guides." How do you understand faith and love guiding you?
5. How do you understand poverty in spirit, poor in spirit?
6. For what reasons do you think this Beloved of souls, whose great desire it is to love and fill all souls with himself, should have for withdrawing?
7. What has been your response to all that you experience of God's love for you?

***Spiritual Canticle* Stanzas 11-19**

1. In what ways does God reveal himself to you within your daily life?

2. At this point in your life, how do you view death?
3. How do you understand transformation of the soul in love?
4. How do you view suffering?
5. What is your relationship with the Holy Spirit?
6. In what ways does God speak to you?
7. How do you understand peace as a guide?

Spiritual Canticle
Stanzas 20- 30

1. How do you understand grace? To what extent do you use it?
2. How do you see spiritual poverty being related to the use of grace?
3. In matters pertaining to God, what is your greatest desire at this time?
4. How do you understand your partnership with Jesus?
5. How do you understand the will of God in your daily life?
6. How do you understand God's love for you?
7. In what ways does God reveal this love to you in your daily life

Spiritual Canticle
Stanzas 31-40

1. What is your relationship with our Heavenly Father?
2. When or in what situations do you most often give thanks to God?
3. Do you view your faults and weaknesses as helps or hindrances in your spiritual growth? Please explain.
4. What do you see as your gifts? How do you currently put them to use?
5. What is your understanding of faith?
6. How do you understand God's union with the soul?

7. If grace could be considered a commodity, something to be spent, how much grace do you need daily? How much do you spend daily?

Interior Castle
Dwellings 1-2

1. What do you see as the benefits or fruits of humility?
2. "Do not be afraid." Describe your understanding about fear and its effect in the soul.
3. How do you understand perfection?
4. What is your feeling about the unity and love shared for every member of this community?
5. How do you understand or recognize the will of God in your daily life?

Interior Castle
Dwellings 3-5

1. How do you understand the term self-abnegation?
2. What importance do you place on the virtue of obedience?
3. How do you understand the promise of obedience we make as Secular Carmelites? Does it aid in spiritual growth?
4. As Secular Carmelites, we make a promise of chastity according to our state in life. How do you see this promise as an aid in spiritual growth?
5. What aspects of the Rule of St. Albert or the Constitutions aid you most in spiritual growth?

Interior Castle
Dwelling 6

1. Describe the confidence you have in God and his love for you.
2. At this time in your life, what do you desire most in your relationship with God?
3. How much of your day is spent in communication with God?

4. Describe the ways in which God teaches you about who he is and about who you are within your daily life.
5. What do you look at during your daily examine? What benefits do you find in this practice?

Interior Castle
Dwelling 7

1. How do you view God?
2. In what ways does this Carmelite way of life strengthen what you are called to do daily?
3. For what sorts of things is it easy to thank God? For what things is it difficult to thank him?
4. In what ways do you see yourself capable of serving God in this community? In what ways do you not see yourself capable at this time?
5. How do you understand “being” verses “doing”?

Dark Night
Chapters 1-7 Book 1

1. As Secular Carmelites our promise includes living a life according to the Beatitudes. How do the Beatitudes “guide” and strengthen you in this way of life?
2. What is your understanding of justice?
3. What is your understanding of meekness?
4. What is your understanding of mercy?
5. What is your understanding of the reason for sorrowing?

Dark Night
Chapters 8-14 Book 1

1. What is your understanding of purity of heart?
2. How do the Beatitudes lead you closer to God’s reign in your heart?

3. How do you understand the dark night of the senses verses the dark night of the spirit?
4. Why do you suppose humility is considered the key to all the virtues?
5. What are the effects that fear has within you pertaining to spiritual growth?

Dark Night
Chapters 1-12 Book 2

1. How do you experience the effects of the divine flame? In your opinion what does it burn away?
2. Taking a deeper look at the beatitudes, how do you recognize love's action within the soul?
3. "Lord let your face shine on your servant." How does this phrase reveal the soul hidden within God?
4. Describe your understanding of the phrase, "My house being now all stilled."
5. What are the benefits of God testing the soul?

Dark Night
Chapters 13-24 Book 2

1. When God tests a soul what do you think he is looking for?
2. Describe what you think God desires most from his people.
3. Describe your understanding of the imagery of the "ladder." What do you think of this imagery?
4. Describe your understanding of the imagery of the "livery of three colors – white, green and red." What do you think of this imagery?
5. Christ is the light of the world. As we grow closer to God we become "brighter" with his light shining through us. Why do you think this writing is given the title the Dark Night?

Elizabeth of the Trinity
Heaven in Faith
(page 94-113 *Complete Works Vol. 1*)

1. How do you understand the statement, “The kingdom of God is within you”?
2. How do you understand God’s desire to have a partnership, his friendship, within the soul?
3. In your opinion, what is meant by the phrase, “I die daily”?
4. Describe the ‘eternal now.’ How does this hold meaning for you?
5. In your opinion, how are we “made holy and immaculate in God’s presence” in our daily life?
6. Describe “to be holy for I am holy.” Why is this meant for everyone?
7. In the phrase, “Christ is my life,” what does this mean for you?

Elizabeth of the Trinity
The Greatness of our Vocation
(page 124-129 *Complete Works Vol. 1*)

1. If God gives abundant grace to those who call upon him in their weakness or need, describe what you think about the phrase, “nothing can disturb the humble.”
2. How does Blessed Elizabeth’s insight on the relationship between humility, “dying daily,” and “taking up your cross and denying yourself” change your understanding of the unitive way of life?
3. In your opinion, how have “we been made sharers in His divine nature”?
4. Blessed Elizabeth tells us what she sees as the “freest soul” and the “secret of happiness.” Describe your understanding of what she is trying to tell us.
5. What is your opinion on Blessed Elizabeth’s advice on how to handle the movements of pride?
6. Describe your understanding of the phrase, “In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the passion of Christ for the sake of His body, which is the Church.”
7. What do you see as the greatness of our vocation?

Elizabeth of the Trinity
Last Retreat
(page 141- 162 Complete Works Vol. 1)

1. How do you understand the thought, "... He may teach her to fulfill the work which will be hers for eternity and which she must already perform in time, which is eternity begun and still in progress"?
2. Blessed Elizabeth claims to be, "a Praise of Glory." God has predestined you to fulfill for all eternity some aspect within the body of Christ. It is for you to respond to this call through your gifts and his grace. It may be at this time you can't answer this question, but it is one about which you should think and pray. Who are you in the body of Christ? Does your call to the Secular Carmelite way of life aid you in this?
3. The Rule of St. Albert does say, "In silence will your strength be." How do you understand this as a Secular Carmelite?
4. The soul who makes an occupation out of blessing and praising God, humbly clings to him with simple gaze. "Truly this soul is the praise of glory of all His gifts; through everything, even the most commonplace acts" Based upon these lines, what is your understanding about how this soul would be a praise of glory?
5. How important do you think it is to be able to give thanks to God in everything?
6. If all things that we encounter in our daily life come to us by the hand of God and we thank him for all that we receive, how do you think God looks on such a soul?
7. What is your opinion about Blessed Elizabeth's insight into how we are to become empty so that God might fill us with himself?

Elizabeth of the Trinity
Let yourself be Loved
(page 179-181 Complete Works Vol. 1)

1. In what ways do you recognize God's love for you?
2. "Do you love me more than these?" How would this phrase aid you in times of temptation?
3. How have the years you have spent living this Secular Carmelite way of life confirmed your vocation to Carmel? If not, what areas are still in question?
4. Describe the ease or difficulty you find in accepting God's love for you.

5. Describe your understanding of the phrase, “He alone who wants to work in you, even though you will have done nothing to attract this grace except that which a creature can do: works of sin and misery...He loves you like that.”
6. How would you define “remaining in communion with Love”?
7. From the information provided in this letter, what would you say is God’s greatest desire for his creatures? How is he loved by this action?

Biblical Study of Elijah
(1 Kings 17:1, 1 Kings 17:2-6, 1 Kings 17:7-24)

1. Why do you suppose that St. Elijah is venerated as the founder of the Carmelite Order when in truth he didn’t found any Order during his life time, he only lived a way of life?
2. How do you understand the idea of always remaining in God’s presence or “The Lord lives before whom I stand”?
3. What things, actions or events in your daily life are you willing to trust God to take care of? What things, actions or events are you not willing to allow God to take care of?
4. Describe how you are nourished by daily Scripture reading.
5. In your opinion, does fleeing the world and hiding in God require a complete separation between you and the world? How do you see this type of life fitting into a Secular Carmelites daily life?
6. In your opinion, what is the relationship between doing the will of God and faith?
7. In what way do you see a contemplative as an instrument of God’s use? A Secular Carmelite?

Biblical Study of Elijah
(1 Kings 18, 1 Kings 19:1-18)

1. How much of your day is spent listening?
2. “You have not yet remained sinless even to the point of shedding blood.” Describe Elijah’s faith in God as he must face King Ahab’s wrath. (How faithful are we to the One who desires to fill us completely with His love?)

3. Where do you find the altar of sacrifice in your daily life? How often are sacrifices being made?
4. How much importance do you place upon unity within the Church, within your parish, within the Secular Order, within each community of the Secular Order?
5. How much or to what extent do you feel that your choices affect the people around you, in your community or in the world?

Biblical Study of Elijah
(1 Kings 19: 19-21, 1 Kings 21)

1. What sort of an effect do you think the Secular Order of Carmelites has upon the Church, or upon the world?
2. What benefit do you find in living a hermitical way of life that shares in community?
3. What is your need for community life?
4. Describe how this community helps fulfill those needs.
5. Describe your call to the Carmelite way of life.
6. What sorts of things, signs, events have caused you to consider responding to this call in a permanent way?

Biblical Study of Elijah
(1 Kings 22:52-54, 2 Kings 1:1-17, 2 Kings 2:1-15)

1. Describe your understanding of the phrase, “We have come to Carmel for no other reason than to learn how to die.”
2. In your opinion, where does salvation lie?
3. How do you understand the statement, “Do you know that the Lord will take your master from over you today?” Why is the response “keep still”?
4. When you look at the Secular Order of Carmelite way of life, describe your experience as to whether you can live without this way of life?
5. By way of this Carmelite way of life, prayer, silent listening, etc., how do we proclaim the kingdom of God in our daily lives?