

What Is Spiritual Direction?

What exactly do spiritual directors do? The simple and most direct answer I can give is that they help others attend to God's presence and revelation and prepare to respond to him. In other words, they help people attune themselves to God.

David Benner, Sacred Companions, p.106

Spiritual direction is meeting with a trained and experienced director to reflect on how God is present and active in your life right now, and how God might be calling you into deeper relationship. God is the Director; the human director serves as the vessel through which the Spirit works to uncover and discover the Divine at work in your everyday experiences. The content of the direction session is simply your life: whatever aspect, story, or experience you feel moved to bring to prayer and reflection. You the seeker, your director, and the Holy Spirit meet in holy conversation so "you may have life and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10)

"Something broken in me keeps telling me if I just work harder, read more Scripture, and become a better pray-er, God will be pleased and perhaps my life will be easier. This misconception and the myriad of other false beliefs that not-so-occasionally reek havoc in my body and brain are called out into the light when I seek spiritual direction. I notice God at work in places I hadn't considered and in ways I hadn't imagined....What started as curiosity, then pure discipline, has become a tender resting place in my journey through this world. [Meeting with a spiritual director] has become like a wayside chapel on a pilgrimage route where the weary pilgrim seeks sustenance and rest for body and soul."

Beth Slevcove, quoted in Tony Jones, The Sacred Way, p. 108

Above all, a spiritual director listens and helps you to come clear about the hints and guesses, the invitations, and the "nudgings" of the Spirit in your life. A director:

- Helps you to be aware, to notice, to "wake up" to the spiritual relationship you have with God.
- Helps you with discernment, spiritual practices, and methods of prayer.
- May, at times, suggest scripture and other spiritual reading that may enlighten your path.

Your director is present as a compassionate, and respectful witness to the joys and sorrows of your journey. Together you pray for that "closer walk" with God. Spiritual direction is simply what it appears to be: an intentional time of listening to and following the voice of God in your life.

You might seek out a spiritual director?

- When heading out on a path of growth
- When seeking God in the complexity of life
- When needing objective wisdom
- When making decisions on life direction

- When desiring accountability
- Discernment in decision making

Topics you might explore in spiritual direction include image of God and one's identity in Christ, deepening one's life of prayer, practicing the presence of God, maturing in Christlikeness, increased self-awareness and insight, and strengthening human relationships.

While neither discipleship nor counseling, spiritual direction can and often does involve:

- being exposed to and learning new prayer practices,
- understanding the vital nature of the spiritual disciplines,
- experiencing silence in the context of spiritual growth,
- exploring the false self and moving toward the true self designed by God,
- interior reflection and healing prompted by the movement of the Spirit.

The direction relationship is one that is meant to be entered into with prayerful and careful attention. In general, a direction relationship lasts for at minimum two years, but deep and growing direction relationships can last for a lifetime. Unlike counseling, the focus is not on problem-solving or dealing with specific life issues, although sometimes they will be addressed. In direction, the focus is on the individual's relationship with God, which is constantly in motion, even when it feels like everything has stopped.

What Spiritual Direction is Not

Spiritual direction is not psychotherapy, counseling, or any other type of therapy. It is not a dependent relationship in which your director holds all the wisdom and answers to your problems. Your director does not "tell you what to do", but rather helps you to discern what God may be calling you to be or to do. God is already at work in your life. You come to your session ready to be still, and together with your director, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, listen to the truths of your story as God reveals God's self through the everyday happenings of your life.