



## WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

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Christian Spiritual Direction is one of the Church's ancient and mystical traditions. As early as the fourth century, Christians sought out the advice and wisdom of the holy hermits in the deserts of Palestine, Syria, and Egypt to learn how to live entirely for God. Succeeding generations continued the search for reliable guides. Throughout the centuries, spiritual masters such as Catherine of Sienna, Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and Francis de Sales continued on this tradition in guiding Christians who long for a personal relationship with God.

In the twentieth century, spiritual direction continues to follow these wise men and women while adapting to other ways that might assist a person in spiritual progress. More contemporary Christian guides have been Richard Foster, Francis Schaffer, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Marjorie Thompson, Margaret Guenther, among others.

The spiritual director is a spiritual guide and companion who listens to us, who helps us talk about our spiritual life, helps us to notice sacred moments in our ordinary life experiences, helps us to respond to God with greater freedom, may offer advice as to practical disciplines and exercises for spiritual growth, loves us, and prays for us.

Below is a collection of quotes from the most respected authors on Spiritual Direction. These are gathered and compiled to help you appreciate the nuances of this unique ministry.

### **a) Spiritual Direction helps an individual to pay attention to God's presence in their lives**

William Barry & William Connolly define spiritual direction as "help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship" Barry & Connolly p8

"Spiritual direction that stems from the heart of the Christian tradition has no axes to grind, no pet theories on which its efficacy depends. It is primarily concerned with helping individuals freely to place themselves before God who communicates to them and makes them more free. The focus of the direction is on God and the way God seems to relate to each person, never on ideas." Barry & Connolly P44

"Much of the work of spiritual direction involves the gentle direction of attention." Susan Phillips (Candlelight, p72)

The tasks of a spiritual director are "First, helping directees pay attention to our self-revealing God; second, helping directees recognize their reactions and decide on their responses to this God." Barry & Connolly p48

"Spiritual direction is about listening to people's stories, listening for glimpses of grace and hints of the holy, listening for the breakthrough presence of God in the midst of ordinary life." Sue Pickering (Spiritual Direction, pxiii)

### **b) Spiritual Direction helps an individual respond to God**

"Teaching, preaching and moral guidance are not the proper tasks of spiritual directors. Their task is to help people experience God's action and respond to God. Fostering discovery rather than teaching doctrine is their purpose." Barry & Connolly P43

"God is the deepest dimension in all the areas of human life, and thus all areas are open to spiritual direction. The purpose of direction will be to sensitize people further to the presence and action of God in their lives, and to assist them to make a fuller and more appropriate response to it." Thomas Hart (The Art of Christian Listening, p32)

"Spiritual direction could be defined as taking place when one person (the director) prayerfully supports and encourages another person (the directee) to attend and respond to God. As a fellow pilgrim, the spiritual director accompanies the directee on this journey of faith." Sue Pickering (Spiritual Direction, p3)



**c) Spiritual Direction helps an individual to open their lives to God**

"Spiritual direction takes as its primary function to help directees to open themselves to God and to overcome their resistance to the mystery of God." Barry & Connolly P166

"Spiritual direction is partly about helping people to overcome their resistance and evasion and try to face God directly." Gordon Jeff (Spiritual Direction, p55)

"Spiritual Direction is concerned with helping a person directly with his or her relationship with God." B&C p5 "it is directly concerned with a persons actual experiences of the relationship with God." Barry & Connolly P8

**d) Spiritual Direction helps a person progress and grow in spiritual maturity**

"It is the process of spiritual maturing which is the purpose of spiritual direction." Kenneth Leech (soul friend p33)

"Spiritual directors deal not so much with problems, but with progress, progress in the spiritual life." Thomas Hart (The Art of Christian Listening, p27)

"Ultimately, the motivation for spiritual direction has to become the desire to grow in relationship with God." Barry & Connolly P153

**e) Spiritual Direction helps a person with spiritual discernment**

"The Primary function of spiritual direction is to provide assistance in two areas, that of clarification and that of discernment." John H Wright (Soul Friend, p72)

"A spiritual director will use a variety of methods including "empathic listening, paying attention, affirming, assisting in clarification, raising questions when the directee wants them, and helping the directee to recognize the affective attitudes that influences his or her attitude to God." B Barry & Connolly p47

**f) Spiritual Direction helps an individual to develop a relationship of honesty with God**

"Spiritual directors encourage their directees to ask for what they want from God. In the beginning their desires may be very broad: to experience God's presence, to know God better, for instance. Such requests should reflect their real desires, and part of the work of spiritual directors is to help directees to clarify and say what they really want." Barry & Connolly p52

"The relationship that is fostered in spiritual direction is the relationship not of the director and directee, but of the directee and God; the directee's personal growth and development will occur primarily through this latter relationship. Spiritual direction aims to help the directee to enter into a more profound relationship with God where transference reactions to God can be faced and overcome by God's own reality." Barry & Connolly p171

"In spiritual direction we help directees nurture their response to God in ways that are authentic for them, that emerge from their own context, perhaps in the midst of pain, or in the joy of celebration." Sue Pickering (Spiritual Direction, p87)

**g) Spiritual Direction recognizes that the Holy Spirit is the one who leads the conversation**

"Direction, as I understand it, is two people sitting down together in an attitude of prayer to try and discern where the Holy Spirit is directing." Gordon Jeff (Spiritual Direction, p12)

"In fact the Holy Spirit is the true director, drawing the directee to a richer encounter with God." Sue Pickering (Spiritual Direction, p2)



**h) Spiritual Direction is where one Christian seeks to help another in their walk with God.**

"The director is simply a person who tries to be sufficiently open to be used by God in helping others." Gordon Jeff (Spiritual Direction, p33)

"Christian spiritual direction seeks to help directees:

- a) dive deeper into prayer and draw closer to God in everyday life;
- b) discover God's care in the midst of difficulties;
- c) become aware of the sacred within the ordinary events of life;
- d) honestly share with God their feelings, doubts and questions;
- e) become more like Christ and experience the fruit of the Spirit;
- f) move from a preoccupation with their sinfulness to a grace-full life of love and service."

Sue Pickering (Spiritual Direction, p3)

"In contemplative, incarnational spiritual direction, we depend on the Holy Spirit to guide our thinking, warm our compassion, inspire our discernment and help us assist our directees to:

- a) explore their experience of God, whether in prayer, through traditional vehicles of Scripture and creation, or through daily life events or symbols which attract the directees attention.
- b) grow in their ability to rest in God;
- c) express their emotions as well as their thoughts;
- d) begin to believe they are loved and allow more of God into more of their lives;
- e) let the changes in them become visible in their outer world."

Sue Pickering (Spiritual Direction, p30)