
What is it?

Spiritual direction is the term given for Christian guidance, help, and encouragement provided by one person to another.

Why do it?

All of us are registered with a doctor, whom we may see regularly, occasionally, or in an emergency, as appropriate. With spiritual direction, the pattern is just as variable, and for the same reasons. Our physical health affects how we feel, our work and personal life, our sexual life and our mental ability. Similarly, how we are spiritually has its impact on every corner of our lives.

Our relationship with God is centred on prayer, our individual relationship with him. It is shared with and affected by our life in the church – the sacraments we receive, the teaching we absorb, and the Christian fellowship to which we belong. But it is worked out, earthed and put to use, and to the test, in the whole of our lives.



Spiritual direction involves regular meetings with someone of wisdom and experience in our search for God in everything. For the Christian, the 'spiritual life' is all life, in the Spirit – not merely a 'religious' corner set aside for God. It is not a practice only for a 'spiritual elite' or for those of us who are professionally religious – monks, nuns, or clergy. All of us need guidance in discerning God's action in our lives, and in the lives of those around us.

Whatever else it is about, spiritual direction should begin and end with our openness to God in prayer and worship – for this is the basis of everything, being where God reaches us most intensely. As we open ourselves to him, we start to see the world through his eyes, and our lives begin to change as God opens the eyes of our mind.

For some Christians it may be that they need a spiritual director to teach them to pray at all, or to help with the difficulties most of us have in praying. Other kinds of help may be available elsewhere, but this rarely is. Even if we feel we know how to pray, we need to advance, to go deeper and ensure that our prayer bears fruit. A wise confidant can also discern

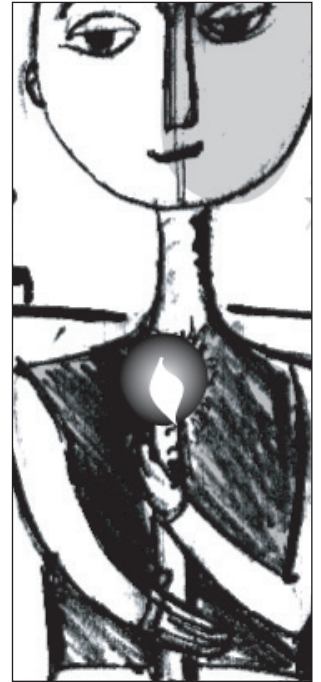
'...spiritual direction should begin and end with our openness to God ...'

where we need to be challenged or consoled, and can see patterns of growth and reasons for thankfulness and praise. On our own, we miss so much that is good and encouraging, and avoid that which needs repentance and challenge.

How do I do it?

You may be able to meet from time to time with a priest you know. (It is often easier to tell whether you are on the same wavelength if you have heard someone preach.) Many spiritual directors, however, are laypeople, some of them members of religious communities. If you want to pursue this, ask your parish priest, someone at your cathedral, or find out if your bishop has asked someone to coordinate the work of spiritual direction.

To be accompanied on your spiritual journey is a sign of strength and wisdom, not of weakness. You wouldn't go through life without a doctor, would you?



FURTHER READING

Gordon Jeff, *Spiritual Direction for every Christian*, 1987

Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend*, 1977

Gospel Imprint, *Confession*

Christ has no **body** now
on **earth**
but **yours**,

no **hands** but **yours**,
no **feet** but **yours**,

yours are the **eyes** through which
Christ's compassion
the feet is to look out to the
earth,

yours are the **feet** by which
he is to go about **doing good**
and **yours**
are the **hands**
by which he is to **bless** us now.

Attributed to St Teresa of Avila, (1515-1582)

Spiritual Direction

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