

# Practical Helps for Better Spiritual Direction

## Spiritual Direction:

Many different people have defined spiritual direction in many different ways. William Barry and William Connolly, in their book, The Practice of Spiritual Direction, define it in this way:

We define Christian spiritual direction, then, 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. The *focus* of this type of spiritual direction is on experience, not ideas.

-Barry and Connolly<sup>1</sup>, pg. 8

Spiritual direction, therefore, is a *companioning* that helps us to move, not so much inwardly or outwardly, but rather, deepwardly in our relationship with God. Through the spiritual accompanying of our spiritual director we find ourselves better able to name and savor the nuances of our relationship with God and to respond more wholehearted to that deepening intimacy.

## Suggestions Pertaining to the Directee:

- ✚ Reviewing your prayer journal<sup>2</sup> is a great way to prepare for spiritual direction!
- ✚ Build a vocabulary of feeling words and use it to better describe your spiritual experience.<sup>3</sup>
- ✚ Begin direction by very briefly recapping your previous spiritual direction session and the grace for which you were praying. This will provide a frame of reference for starting the direction session and help to see how God has been present.
- ✚ The “topic” for spiritual direction is usually related directly to one’s prayer time.

Religious experience is to spiritual direction what foodstuff is to cooking. Without foodstuff there can be no cooking. Without religious experience there can be no spiritual direction.

-Barry and Connolly, pg. 8

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<sup>1</sup> William Barry and William Connolly, The Practice of Spiritual Direction, HarperCollins.

<sup>2</sup> Find out more on journaling on the website!

<sup>3</sup> Find a sample “Feeling Words” list on the website!

- ✚ It is best to avoid telling lengthy stories during direction.
- ✚ Focus instead on the “movements” of your heart. What has been the greatest consolation or desolation since your last direction session?
- ✚ “**Resistance**” is a technical term in spiritual direction that refers to a directee or director’s reluctance to address an important movement of his or her heart. When one or more of the following signs of resistance are regularly occurring in prayer or spiritual direction, it means something important is not being addressed:<sup>4</sup>
  - Being self-preoccupied.
  - Having a “constantly cheery, emotionally unnuanced experience of prayer.”
  - Saying the same thing, over and over, session after session.
  - Frequently falling asleep in prayer or spiritual direction.
  - Avoiding prayer.
  - Regularly missing appointments or rescheduling them.
  - Repeatedly being late to spiritual direction.
  - Avoiding talking about prayer experiences with the director.
  - Wanting to quit spiritual direction.
  - Regularly switching spiritual directors.
  - Fearing the loss of God and/or one’s self.
  - A distorted image of God.
  - Being routinely analytical during spiritual direction.
  - Turning the “spotlight” onto the director by asking things like, “How would you handle my situation?” or “Can you tell me more about your prayer?”
  - Routinely reading from one’s prayer journal during direction.
- ✚ Some questions to ask yourself in preparation for direction might include:
  - Has there been a predominant theme to my prayer or journaling?
  - What is one particular religious experience that stands out as important since my last direction session?
  - What has been the “grace” I’ve been asking God for the most?
  - What has been the strongest desire of my heart since my last direction session?

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<sup>4</sup> These are taken primarily from Barry and Connolly.