

“So, what *is* spiritual direction?”

I have heard this question a lot. I am not sure my answers are getting much clearer. At least now I can fairly confidently say what spiritual direction is *not*. A spiritual director is *not* a counselor or psychotherapist, *not* a life coach or personal trainer, *not* an accountability or prayer partner, and *not* the same for every person. Spiritual direction is *not* pushy, and not even very *directive*!

So, what *is* spiritual direction? Spiritual direction is an ancient Christian practice that is very effective for spiritual growth. Generally, the director and directee meet monthly for about an hour. According to the Mennonite Spiritual Directors Association, “Fundamentally a ministry of prayer, spiritual direction is a one-with-one relationship in which directors accompany others on their journey to mature faith in Christ.” For me, the key words here are “prayer,” “relationship,” “accompany,” and “Christ.” Spiritual direction is helping another person fulfill their desire to really know God.

God is always communicating with us. The spiritual director helps the directee hear, see, feel and recognize our self-revealing God. As we see how God is already active in our lives, our relationship with Him deepens; we see all of life more clearly; and we get glimpses of how to follow Him and how to allow Him to love us. The personal relationship with Jesus of which we have heard so much and the abiding and passionate love for God we have always desired finally come to life.

As a Christian spiritual director, Jesus is central in my life. This unchanging foundation will come out as I direct people. However, there is much freedom in direction because there is much, much trust in *God* as the Director. This freedom shows up in multiple ways. For example, I may teach directees options of ways to pray, but I do not “check up” on them to see if they did it. I trust that the directees will continue to move toward God as God is speaking and inviting them. It is not my job to make that happen (just to accompany and support and even cheer the process). And it *is* my job to be a care-full listener and to pray often for my directees.

So, who would benefit from going to a spiritual director? Oh, that answer is much easier...*Anyone* who wants to grow in relationship with God! Spiritual direction is particularly helpful at times of transition, for discernment and decision-making. However, meeting with a spiritual director is also an opportunity to ask God questions, reflect on life experiences, understand oneself better, explore hopes and dreams, and especially to offer time and hold open space to hear God’s voice.

God has given me so much through spiritual direction that I feel a little microburst of joy when others discover this gift also. I know a lot of courage is required to intentionally invite God to enter and indwell us—mind, heart, spirit, and body. We experience an unsettled feeling, wondering what in the world this unmanageable yet attentive, huge but tender, indefinable yet intimate God has in mind for us. However, in taking the risk to know God better, we learn new ways to “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10) and to join with the Apostle Paul in declaring, “For me, to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21). We experience afresh God as our refuge and strength and the lover of our souls.

If this little introduction to spiritual direction has raised more questions and provided you with less answers than you want, feel free to email or chat with me. I can tell you more of what spiritual direction is *not*, and I may even be able to tell you more clearly what spiritual direction *is*. However, the best answer to the question, “So, what is spiritual direction?” is found in responding to the invitation Jesus so often gives us, to “come and see.”