

What is Spiritual Direction?

By Pat Kerlin, Certified Spiritual Director and Life Coach

"With the recent resurgence of personal searches for spirituality, participating in spiritual direction and having a 'spiritual director' is one of the ways that is becoming more and more popular."

(Joseph F. Colletti, Presence Magazine, 2009).

Though this has been eight years ago, the popularity has continued. *What exactly do we mean by spiritual direction?* I heard a Rabbi speak at a Spiritual Director's Conference in New Mexico a few years ago say the answer was very simple, "*Spiritual Direction is about helping a person listen to God.*"



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I would have to agree with that, yet discovering the answer to 'who is this God that we listen to', is a lifetime journey. We may during the process of spiritual direction recognize the limitations of our spiritual perspective and discover new images of God and how our relationship with ourselves, others and the divine may not be as concrete as we thought. Having a spiritual companion (director) walk alongside of us during these times can be very helpful.

What are some of the purposes of spiritual direction? As mentioned earlier, the overall purpose is to help individuals grow in a personal relationship with God, to listen to God. Some specific purposes are to assist people:

1. to **recognize** God's specific self-communication in life, prayer, and relationships.
2. to **savor, relive and enjoy** the deep affective touches of God
3. to **respond** interiorly and exteriorly to God's self-revelation.
4. to **notice differences** in oneself as a result of affective experiences of God
5. to recognize, **explore, unpack areas of darkness and unfreedom** that keep us from responding to God's presence and desires for us
6. to grow in an **affective and intimate relationship** with God and
7. to experience greater **interior freedom, deeper joy, a more integrated life and more intimate relationships** with self and others.

(Sr. Maureen Conroy, the Upper Room, Neptune, New Jersey)

I come from a Christian background though I am very respectful of all persons whether affiliated with a formal religious tradition or not. Having lived in Indonesia and Australia for 15 years, I met people on all sorts of spiritual pathways. As a Christian, I firmly believe the words of Jesus when he said, "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full." These are not empty words. We deserve to have peace, joy, love, family, friends, etc.

All world religions believe there is an infinite source within us where the divine presence dwells. As we connect with the source within us, this fullness of life is very possible. Some of us may not be consciously aware of this. Some of us may find it hard to trust such language as God, higher power, divine presence, true self, etc., while others are curious to discover more. As we spiritually mature, we find persons willing to go deeper into some "big" questions such as, 'Why am I here and what is my purpose?' Sometimes life's circumstances push us to look at these and other "big" questions, with some urgency when we may be feeling confused, lost and unable to control outcomes.

So, where do we find support?

Counseling, talking with a good friend, pastor, priest, or rabbi are options. Counseling provides insight and healing which takes place through the relationship and dialogue between counselor and client. Spiritual direction also offers insight and healing yet this occurs primarily through the relationship and dialogue between God and directee, and secondarily through the relationship between director and directee. The overall difference is one of contemplation or attentiveness to, and absorption in, God. Professionally trained persons in a confidential, safe environment facilitate both. Spiritual direction is often once a month for an hour or offered on an "as needed" basis. The agenda for the session is always the directees.

Do you sense a desire to discover more what spiritual direction may add to your life?

Give us a call at The Center for Stress Management where Pat or Debbie can assist you.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CENTER

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