

The Ministry of Spiritual Direction
Presenter: Larry Glover-Wetherington

A Contemplative Reading of Psalm 42

(Instructions: Pause about 15 seconds between the reading of each verse and observe 2 minutes of silence at the end of the Psalm.)

Psalms 42:1-11 NIV

- (1) **For the director of music. A *maskil* of the Sons of Korah.** As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.
- (2) My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?
- (3) My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"
- (4) These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.
- (5) Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and
- (6) my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.
- (7) Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.
- (8) By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life.
- (9) I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"
- (10) My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"
- (11) Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

What is spiritual direction?

Spiritual direction, also known as spiritual friendship, or spiritual companionship, is a ministry of one person accompanying another along his or her spiritual journey.

- The Holy Spirit is the true Director.
- Spiritual direction is the opportunity to reflect on your relationship with God while another is prayerfully in the presence of God on your behalf.
- The spiritual director assists you along the way by
 - asking reflective questions,
 - pointing out God's movements in your life,
 - encouraging new directions,
 - suggesting resources and spiritual exercises or spiritual disciplines that can nurture your intimacy with God,
 - sometimes naming your resistance to God
 - or just prayerfully listening.

The spiritual journey

Life is filled with ups and downs, joys and sorrows, successes and failures, blessings and potholes, eras of stability and periods of upheaval.

- The spiritual journey is a task of navigating those challenges in relationship with God and the mystery of God in itself.

So we may have questions like:

- How do I know if it is God moving me or if it is just my own thoughts and feelings?
- How do I proceed with God in this or that situation?
- Why do I feel so dry spiritually?
- Why do my prayers seem fruitless?
- Why does God seem so absent from my life?
- Where was God during this tragedy in my life?
- It doesn't even have to be about any of these earth shaking kinds of questions, it can just be about your daily walk with God and spiritual disciplines.

What is the difference between spiritual direction and psychotherapy or pastoral counseling?

Psychotherapy and pastoral counseling have to do with particular life issues or crises, and the focus of the counseling is on resolving those matters. Pastoral counselors have both theological and psychological training. They are more likely than a secular psychotherapist to be friendly to your faith and are more trained to work with faith concerns. Spiritual questions and faith convictions may be explored as they pertain to the life issue or crisis at hand and may be utilized to help resolve them.

The focus of spiritual direction is one's relationship with God. While life issues may be discussed, they are always addressed from the perspective one's relationship with God. Regardless of the life context, one is challenged to discern God's presence and leading. A primary matter is always how one is relating to God in prayer.

Spiritual direction may not be a person's real need at the moment, or may need to be combined with other assistance.

The spiritual direction relationship.

The Spiritual direction relationship may range from being very informal to professional.

- There is a sense in which any spiritual conversation you have with someone could be considered spiritual direction, but the ministry of spiritual direction is more intentional and on a regular basis by appointment with someone.
- Spiritual direction should be with someone who is familiar with this ministry. There are many, but varied training programs for spiritual directors.
- Generally meetings are monthly for one hour.
 - Try it for three weeks and see how it is going. The person may not be a good match for you.

- Professional ethics and boundaries should be observed with the same concerns as a professional counselor
 - There should be awareness of transference and counter-transference
 - Transference occurs when the spiritual director by looks or mannerism may remind you positively or negatively of some other significant person in your life to the point that it clouds or interferes with the purpose of the session.
 - Counter-transference occurs when your appearance or mannerisms reminds the spiritual director of some significant person in his or her life and it becomes an impediment in the quality of direction offered.
 - In other words, as much as is humanly possible, care is taken to consider your spiritual concerns on their own.

What does it cost?

I do not know anyone who makes a fulltime living from the ministry of spiritual direction. Some directors may not have a fee at all, but it is only fair to consider a donation for their ministry, especially if they have invested significant time and finances in training and are giving their time to this ministry.

Where do I find a spiritual director?

The following two websites are places you can go to begin your search for a spiritual director in your area. Please be aware that everything under the sun flies under the banner of spirituality these days. There are questions provided below that you can use to interview someone.

- www.shalem.org
- www.sdiworld.org

There are also more and more Baptists who now practice this ministry. If you have a Baptist preference, you are welcome to contact me, and I will try to locate one for you.

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Questions you should ask a prospective spiritual director.

Spiritual Directors International recommends you interview at least two prospective spiritual directors, if possible, using questions such as these:

1. What enrichment, spiritual formation, and theological education do you have in spiritual direction?
2. What is your personal experience tending your own prayer, meditation and contemplative life?

3. What is your experience as a spiritual director? How many years? In what environments? What are you most interested in spiritually?
4. How do you continue your education and supervision for your spiritual direction ministry?
5. What ethical guidelines do you abide by, such as those published by Spiritual Directors International? Have you ever been accused or convicted of misconduct?
6. What type of engagement agreement will we establish to clarify roles and responsibilities in our spiritual direction relationship, such as samples provided to members of Spiritual Directors International?

For more information on spiritual direction or ways of doing it you may refer to my website www.consultmin.com and click on the page for Spiritual Direction and the FAQ page.