

**Spiritual Direction:
A Necessary Companion for Christian Growth**

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Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme of Spiritual Growth Ministries**

Introduction

Some years ago, I was serving as an evangelism ministry staff in a local church. One day, I asked myself, “*After all the doing and being, what am I becoming? Have I become a project manager, organizing evangelistic programmes and training at church? What happened to my pastoral calling? What about my personal walk with the Lord?*” Little did I know that these questions actually set me on a journey, exploring my inner being and examining my relationship with God. The journey began when I was invited to take a silent retreat in a Roman Catholic retreat centre and to hold regular conversations with a spiritual director. It was at those sessions of spiritual direction that I was brought to process and discern my heartfelt questions and thoughts in the presence of God. It became a journey that led me to discover not only my knowing God but also knowing myself again.

Gradually I realized that I became involved in another ‘conversion’ and transformational process. Like T. S. Eliot beautifully described, I was drawn to the place of God’s love and His calling again, as he wrote:

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling

We shall not cease from exploration,

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

~ Four Quartets, Little Gidding, V

Over time, I realized that the continual conversations I had in spiritual direction saw my spiritual directors companioning with me, helping me respond to God who liberates me to live by the rhythms of His grace. Since then, I have become increasingly aware of God’s presence in my life and ministry.

However, I realize that the ministry of spiritual direction is not commonly seen in the protestant churches in Singapore where I live. Apart from the Roman Catholics, most Protestant Christians do not seek regular spiritual direction, as most church leaders, both clergy and lay, are more familiar with discipleship and mentoring than spiritual direction. In this paper, I will attempt to present the need for spiritual conversations and direction in the Christian community, the practice and process of spiritual direction, as a necessary companion for Christian growth within the context of the church in Singapore. I hope that in doing so, I could help enrich and inform the discipling ministry in the church where spiritual direction can be included as an important component. Besides this, I trust that this presentation may also help Christians, who are not familiar with spiritual direction, to understand the importance of developing spiritual companionship through

spiritual direction. Included in this project are also the responses from a survey which I had done among twenty evangelical believers pertaining to their faith journey and view of spiritual direction. (The survey questionnaire and responses can be found in Appendix I.)

I. The Need for Spiritual Conversations and Direction

The Christian life is often viewed as a journey towards Christlikeness, maturing in one's relationship with God and people. As such, Christian education is commonly treated as an essential ministry to help further the faith of believers. However, as a Christian progresses in his/her faith journey, the knowledge he/she has acquired through the Christian education ministry at church may soon be tested and tried in the terrains of life circumstances - the ups and downs, victories and defeats, celebrations and challenges. Truth be told, many believers do struggle trying to make sense of life and faith. Is there a guide or spiritual companion whom they can turn to for conversations that will help them examine and clarify competing values that confront them in their day to day dealings?

Moreover, spiritual growth is similar to physical growth. There are spurts of growth in one's spiritual development and there are also times when one tends to live on the plateaus of life and relationship with God. Sometimes, believers who have been there and done that in their faith journey may experience a period of spiritual stagnation or dullness. This may send them feeling that God seems absent or nonexistent and they enter into a time of dryness and darkness. During such times when believers are confronted with the absence of God in their faith journey, who would come alongside to guide them in this unknown terrain?

Having a guide to help discern the hidden work of God may be a nurturing process to move believers into a new level of spiritual awareness and knowing themselves. John Calvin advocates the need for believers to acquire double knowledge - knowing God and knowing oneself. He taught that without the knowledge of God, one cannot know oneself and without the knowledge of self, one cannot know God. Surely, a moment of self-discovery is also a place where good spiritual growth begins, isn't it? Yet this journey of self-discovery and knowing God is not to be taken alone.

Increasingly, we do see Christian leaders experiencing fatigue, disillusion and burnout as a result of the demands in ministry, losing their intimacy with God. Ruth Barton, a pastor and writer, shared her experience of burnout and her quest for intimacy with God when she wrote: *How does one attend to the heart's desperate longing for God in the midst of so much religious activity? What do you do when all the familiar methods of seeking God come up empty? Where does a Christian leader go to articulate*

*questions that seem dangerous and almost sacrilegious?*¹ Help, she wrote, came through a spiritual director - *someone who was more experienced in the ways of the soul, more practiced at recognizing God's invitations in the life of another and willing to support them in making a faithful response.*² Hence, beyond active ministry, the need for soul-care relationships is important and these relationships can be developed through having spiritual conversations and receiving spiritual direction. Today, many believers are seeking for safe places for individual guidance and direction. All respondents to the survey who had experienced some form of spiritual direction replied that they would recommend spiritual direction to a fellow believer. Their reasons were mainly that spiritual direction helps one to focus on God, to explore and discern God's presence, God's purpose, to dialogue on one's lived experiences and to locate one's story in God's story.

Inevitably, committing to the continual process of growth in the Christian journey is not a journey to be taken alone. Spiritual conversations and spiritual direction as a companion for Christian growth are essential to help one manage the threats and challenges to one's faith, chart the unknown territories of new spiritual awareness and self-knowledge, attend to the desire for intimacy with God, and the need of soul-care.

II. The Practice of Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction in its classical form happens when spiritual guidance is given in a formal, regular one-to-one relationship with another. Although the term 'spiritual direction' is not mentioned in the Scriptures, its practice is clearly rooted in the Word of God. For instance, we read of spiritual guides like Moses, Eli, Elijah, Naomi and Nathan in the Old Testament. Moreover, the practice of spiritual direction often happens in the ministries of our Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples. Bruce Demarest gives a thorough study of following Jesus as spiritual director in his book, *Soul Guide*. He writes that "*as we watch Jesus in His encounters with people from all walks of life, and in complex situations, we can begin to comprehend His heart and imitate His practice. ... In Jesus Christ, we find the pattern of spiritual guidance and the qualities of the ideal spiritual director.*"³ Throughout the Gospels, besides teaching and preaching, Jesus was often seen to have conversations with individuals where he ministered spiritual direction to those with concerns and needs that are amazingly similar to our own. Indeed, for the people who came to him, although with differing needs from Nicodemus' enquiry about being born again to the rich young ruler's struggle to follow Jesus, Jesus as a spiritual guide patiently listened, clarified their doubts and directed them to the new way of life. Paul also wrote numerous letters of spiritual guidance to believers and developed a spiritual father and son relationship with Timothy and mentoring relationship with Titus.

¹ Barton, Ruth, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, InterVarsity Press, Illinois, 2010, p28

² *ibid*

³ Demarest, Bruce, *Soul Guide*, NavPress, Colorado, 2003, p17

After the apostolic period, the early Church Fathers continually emphasized the need for spiritual guidance as David Benner commented: *Spiritual direction, the jewel in the crown of soul-care relationships, has been an important part of formal relationships of Christian nurture since the earliest days of the church.*⁴ As a church father, theologian and one who spoke against the heresies that were present in the early church, St Basil would tell his readers to find a man ‘*who may serve you as a very sure guide in the work of leading a holy life*’, and he warned that ‘*to believe that one does not need counsel is great pride*’.⁵ On living the Christian life, St Augustine (354-430) also advocated that ‘*no one can walk without a guide*’.⁶

The practice of spiritual direction became even more prevalent in the fourth and fifth centuries when disciples sought the advice and guidance of holy men and women known as the desert *abbas* (fathers) and *ammās* (mothers) who resided in the deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine. These desert dwelling disciples looked to the desert fathers and mothers for holiness and purity of heart more than for teaching as they deemed God was always the first teacher. Mary Earle commented that: *The desert mothers and fathers understood that at the heart of the Christian path is the call to be in communion with God and with one another. Such communion is possible only when we encounter each other in vulnerable, gentle ways, marked by mutual respect and forbearance.*⁷ Thus it is the spiritual father or mother who would become the spiritual director which helped to nurture the disciples’ inner life through prayer, concern and pastoral care.

This earlier model of spiritual direction which encompasses the praying and caring for the individual, discerning and receiving the manifestation of heart inevitably continued in the emerging monastic communities such as the Cistercian and Benedictine communities thereafter. As a result of new developments in lay spirituality, non-monastic models of spiritual direction were introduced during the period between 12th to 15th centuries. Famous saints in the Roman Catholic tradition such as St Ignatius of Loyola (1495-1556), St. Teresa of Avila (1515-82), St. John of the Cross (1543-91) and St Frances de Sales (1567-1622) taught and saw the necessity of spiritual direction. They regularly saw spiritual directors and were themselves spiritual directors to others. St Ignatius who lived through the period of great intellectual and spiritual discovery and religious turmoil wrote the Spiritual Exercises which contained a detailed view of the role of the director and the foundation for the development of spiritual direction.⁸ Hence, the practice of giving spiritual direction remained even among the laity up till today in the Catholic traditions. This said, among the evangelicals, while there was no substantial emphasis on the ministry of spiritual direction, seeking guidance and mentoring for

⁴ Benner, David, Sacred Companion, InterVarsity Press, Illinois, p87

⁵ Leech, Kenneth, Soul Friends, Morehouse Publishing, USA, 2001, p37

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Earle, Mary, The Desert Mothers, Morehouse Publishing, USA, 2007, p39

⁸ Leech, Kenneth, Soul Friends, Morehouse Publishing, USA, 2001, p54

Christian growth was nonetheless encouraged. Besides the Bible, ancient Christian traditions inevitably bear witness to the practice of spiritual guidance and spiritual direction among believers. The evangelical church certainly needs to rediscover this heritage and ancient form of Christian soul care - the ministry of spiritual direction.

III. The Process of Spiritual Direction

As in all helping relationships, spiritual direction understood as a process begins in the formation of a companionship between the spiritual director and the directee. This is seen in Barry and Connolly's definition of spiritual direction: *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 consequence of that relationship.*⁹ It is this companionship that facilitates the directee's passage of spiritual growth as he/she experiences the following:

- a. Providential Presence
- b. Pastoral Listening
- c. Prophetic Truth Telling
- d. Prayerful Response

- a. Providential Presence

Implied in the definition is that the accompanying, companioning is clearly done in the presence of God and in response to Him. While the spiritual director has an essential role in spiritual direction, the actual and main spiritual director is the Holy Spirit. The seventeenth century Benedictine mystic, Dom Augustine Baker, writes regarding the spiritual guide or director: *"In a word, he is only God's usher, and must lead souls in God's way, and not his own."*¹⁰ Hence, the definition affirms that while acknowledging the Holy Spirit as the main spiritual director, the purpose of spiritual direction has its focus not only on God's providential presence through His personal communication to the directee but also the latter's response to God.

⁹ Barry & Connolly, The Practice of Spiritual Direction, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 1998, p.8

¹⁰ Foster, Richard, Celebration of Discipline, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 1998, p.155

b. Pastoral Listening

Spiritual direction as a narrative practice, involves a large part of listening. The essence of listening in spiritual direction is well illustrated by this traditional Chinese character:



It means ‘listen’ and is pronounced as ‘Ding’ in Mandarin. Within it are six other characters. The first character is ear (耳). The other five characters depict the posture and attitude of listening like listening to a king (王) who demands complete and undivided attention as the character ‘ten’ (十) denotes a sense of completeness with eye (目) contact and one (一) heart (心).

Hence, as the spiritual director listens to a story, his/her discerning eye is on the storyteller, he/she primarily listens to the storyteller and not just the story. As such, Francis Kelly and Marie Theresa Coombs, authors of ‘The Way of Spiritual Direction’, advocate that it is the capacity to listen to the person that matters in spiritual direction:

We do not listen to some-thing. Even though we may hear something, if we listen at all, we listen to some-one: to a person.¹¹

Sometimes, for instance, directees may relate how the familiar landmarks of faith in their lives have been blurred and they have difficulties in prayer. The spiritual director, being a listener and co-discerner, offers a safe space to listen without judgment or criticism. Margaret Guenther, a spiritual director and writer, aptly affirms this space:

“The space and time provided . . . is safe not only because it is free from interruption, but also because anything may be said without fear of criticism or exposure.”¹²

This is where spiritual direction becomes a place for the soul to receive support and encouragement while being listened to.

¹¹ Kelly, Francis and Coombs, Marie Theresa, The Way of Spiritual Direction, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1985, p60

¹² Guenther, Margaret, Holy Listening, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, USA, 1992, p19

c. Prophetic Truth-telling

Included in the process of giving spiritual direction is truth-telling - discerning and speaking into the life of the directee. The spiritual director has the privilege not only to listen but also help to connect the details of an individual's story to the mega story of God's redemption. It is in doing so that the directee gets to recognize and claim his/her identity in Christ and discern the action of the Holy Spirit like the reality of God's presence and providence.

Alan Jameison provides a comprehensive resource that shows the transitions a believer would experience at various stages of his/her faith developing journey (See Appendix II). It is during these transition periods that one's understanding and convictions may show signs of dissonance and discontent. The spiritual director who recognizes the signs of transition can help directees deal with the existing tensions. This would involve some degree of truth-telling during spiritual direction when the directee's perceptions or perspectives of life and God could be challenged and clarified. For example, once a youth worker shared she felt that God does not exist. Processing her movement towards the changed belief, I was prompted to ask if she was disappointed with God. As she acknowledged her disappointment, she began to relate the events that led to her feeling a sense of distance from the Lord. I held the space to let her value her experience. It is this sense of God's absence or remorse at one's own inattentiveness to God's presence that Margaret Guenther suggested can be a fruitful place for beginning direction.¹³ It was not a situation to apply principles or rules to the directee's story, but to listen to God together with the directee. It is no wonder she wrote: *True spiritual direction is about the great unfixables in human life. It's about the mystery of moving through time. It's about mortality. It's about love. It's about things that can't be fixed.*¹⁴ Managing the unfixables is helping the directee to hold the tension between what is lacking and arriving at the blessed state of acceptance and peace for instance. It is about learning to stay in the middle ground. The directee in the example later expressed that she could sense that God was present in her disappointment and that He cared for her. Thus, I resonate with Henri Nouwen that *'The discipline of the heart calls for some direction to allow us to overcome fears, to deepen our faith and realize more of who God is for us.'*¹⁵

The discerning process enables directees to wait and examine their heart attitude towards God, their desire for God and perhaps be led to learn anew the way of God. One would agree that the process of discernment in spiritual direction might not yield concrete results but tentative outcome for the directees to continue to hold and mull over a period of time. Recently I was intrigued by the series of ripples that a tiny leaf made on reaching the water surface. While watching, the other leaves fell and formed

¹³ Guenther, Margaret, *Holy Listening*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, USA, 1992, p.32

¹⁴ Guenther, Margaret, *Holy Listening*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, USA, 1992, px

¹⁵ Nouwen, Henri, *Spiritual Direction*, Harper Collins Publisher, New York, 2006, pxvii

the concentric ripples, it dawned on me how sometimes, during spiritual direction, a gentle word of truth or question that landed with the directee can open up possibilities for him/her to consider and respond to God. In so doing, the directee gets to explore the mysteries in his/her journey with God.

d. Prayerful Response

While the spiritual director does not offer solutions or directions, the process of spiritual direction is girded in prayer. It is important to be conscious of the presence of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit within the directee and the director. Gerald May says it well: ... *the primary task of spiritual direction is to encourage within themselves this moment-by-moment attention towards God as frequently as possible during spiritual direction sessions.*¹⁶

Taking a silent pause in the conversation may help to settle the emotions and thoughts of the director and directee, and make space for the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Often it is in these moments that one may encounter the self-discovery and self-surrender experience in contemplative prayer that Kenneth Leech observes as directees respond from the sense of God-consciousness.¹⁷ Recently a directee, after a short pause of silence, expressed that she was blown away when she realized the inner state of her being - how tightly she had held to her expectations of God to do justice. She shared how she was beginning to open her tightly clenched fists before the Lord in response.

Thus, when a directee recognizes a truth for herself and experiences the ‘aha moment’ with the Lord, the experience is given, not worked out by the spiritual director. This is the beauty of spiritual direction as a process, not a method or system of principles for spiritual growth.

IV. What then are the implications of Spiritual Direction for Disciple-making?

I would like to suggest the following:

- Spiritual direction can help to deepen the work of disciple-making

In the evangelical community, it is common to find the model of disciple-making designed around Christian education, fellowship and service. As such, in its attempt to nurture a disciple, the mentoring and disciple-making ministry is nonetheless primarily cognitive, didactic and service-oriented. However, it is important to note that inner transformation is also God’s work in the heart, as Henri Nouwen wrote: *The goal of spiritual direction is spiritual formation - the ever*

¹⁶ May, Gerald, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 1992, p.116

¹⁷ Leech, Kenneth, *Soul Friend*, Morehouse Publishing, USA, 2001, p.181

*increasing capacity to live a spiritual life from the heart. A spiritual life cannot be formed without discipline, practice and accountability.*¹⁸ Implied in this definition is that the disciple-making ministry needs to include the ministry of spiritual formation so that believers can cultivate the spiritual practices of silence, stillness and solitude for example, and at some ‘growing’ points of their lives, they can be encouraged to seek spiritual direction. The commitment to spiritual direction can then afford the opportunity for spiritual depth and friendship with God to develop.

- Spiritual direction can cultivate friendship with Christ besides discipleship and servant hood

During Jesus’ long conversation with his disciples in the Upper Room in John 15:14 ,15 (NIV), he emphatically told them, “*You are my friends... I no longer call you servants . . . Instead, I have called you friends,. . .*” Moreover, Christ’s beloved disciple, John, repeatedly addressed his readers as ‘beloved’ in his epistles. Would not the disciple-making ministry include the ministry of spiritual formation and direction to help nurture the disciple as beloved children and friend of Jesus? In retrospect, most of us are only used to relating with Jesus as students of His word and servants of His mission. Surely as disciples, we need to move from knowing about God to knowing God, don’t we?

Aelred of Rievaulx, an abbot of the great English Cistercian abbey of Rievaulx (1147-1167) emphasized greatly on spiritual friendship as the way to God: *God instituted human friendship in creation and grounded it in Christ’s presence. It therefore leads in this life directly to the experience of Christ and in the next to eternal friendship with God.*¹⁹ Henri Nouwen once asked himself: *Does becoming older draw me nearer to Jesus?*²⁰ Implicit in Aelred’s emphasis and Nouwen’s question is the notion that a growing intimacy in one’s relationship with Jesus is to be desired. This is affirmed as most participants in the survey when asked: ‘*If there was one thing you would like to grow in your faith journey, what would it be?*’, expressed that it is to develop a close relationship with God and they have been Christians for more than twenty years.

As such, there is a real need to help growing disciples come to Him for intimate relationship. I resonate with Jeanette Bakke’s defining spiritual direction as God’s holy invitation.²¹ Indeed we need to help disciples realize the need to accept God’s holy invitations to engage in conversations of the heart, soul and spirit from time to time. It is through these conversations that the disciple may develop a vital, growing relationship with God as he/she seeks to live out the relationship in the reality of the

¹⁸ Nouwen, Henri, *Spiritual Direction*, Harper Collins Publisher, New York, 2006, p.xv

¹⁹ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 2010, p41

²⁰ Nouwen, Henri, *In the Name of Jesus*, St Paul Press, India, 1989, p.18

²¹ Bakke, Jeannette, *Holy Invitations - Exploring Spiritual Direction*, p.11: *Spiritual direction is the name given to a particular kind of helping relationship whose primary objective is to discern how God is inviting someone to be, to live, to appreciate, and to act in the midst of life.*

social, economic and political context in which he/she lives. As believers receive spiritual direction, lest we think that they will become inward looking, the converse would be that as they grow to become Christlike, it is inevitable that the LORD God will move them toward those in need.

- Grow and equip spiritual companions and directors

Recently, our local newspaper reported that there have been an increasing number of people seeking help with regard to mental health issues during the current Covid19 pandemic. At church, pastors have repeatedly encouraged members to call and check on one another during this trying time. Equipping church members to engage in genuine dialogue that attends to God's presence, helping the other person be aware of Christ's providential presence in his/her life are certainly important in these turbulent times. Moreover, I resonate with David Benner's comment that *'If the church is to be restored to its rightful place of relevance to and preeminence in supporting the care and cure of souls, we must equip and encourage people to offer themselves to others in relationships of soul friendship and spiritual companionship. This will continue to include counselors. And it will require many more well-trained spiritual directors.'*²² As such, the training and equipping of spiritual companions and spiritual directors could be another focus for the ministry of discipling. The survey shows that 14 out of 20 participants would turn to close friends to discuss matters of the soul. Surely, within the church, there could be a sizeable group of mature believers we can equip to come alongside many who are seeking for spiritual guidance and companionship.

- Spiritual direction as an essential part of pastoral ministry

Besides Scripture and prayer, Eugene Peterson advocates the pastoral ministry to also focus on spiritual direction as he shared his convictions that it is at these meetings that God is always doing something: *an active grace is shaping this life into a mature salvation; responding to God is not sheer guesswork: ... each soul is unique in that no wisdom can simply be applied without discerning the particulars of this life, this situation.*²³ As such, it is necessary to make the ministry of spiritual direction more valued and common among the pastorate then, so that the gap between knowledge and experience can be addressed personally. We agree that God does come to us through our individual experiences of Him by ourselves and others. Listening prayerfully to those we teach and dealing honestly with the questions raised by the individuals who come for spiritual direction may set the path for a robust and healthy faith both for the pastor and the pastorate, wouldn't it? While pastors are thus encouraged to give spiritual direction, it would be essential for them to experience the process and benefits of receiving spiritual direction too.

²² Benner, David, Sacred Companion, InterVarsity Press, Illinois, p.19

²³ Petersen, Eugene, Working the Angles, William & Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, 1995, p.150

Conclusion

Spiritual direction as a necessary companion for Christian growth is like making a climb with a guide. I remember how grateful we were for our competent guide who helped us brave the rough terrains of the Negev Desert in Israel. Similarly, the work of spiritual direction certainly helps to give a sense of confidence to the women and men of faith who will be on the road again as they depart from safe places, risking trials and temptations and hoping for their well-being on the journey of life and faith. More importantly, through spiritual direction, one becomes attentive to the very present HELP and GUIDE who walks deeply and personally at his/her side.

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SGM Special Interest Project
Questionnaire & Responses

1. How long have you been a Christian?

Participants' average number of years as Christians: 30.7 years

2. Who do you usually seek to share matters of your soul?

Participants would seek the following:

Close Friends:	14
Close relative / spouse	6
Spiritual director:	3
Mentor:	5
Care Group:	1
Pastoral Staff	5
Colleague	1

3. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rank the level of satisfaction you have in your faith journey?

Participants' level of satisfaction (average score): 7.25

4. If there were one thing you would like to grow in your faith journey, what would it be?

Participants' responses fall into the following desired categories of growth:

Love & Compassion	2
Closeness to God	14
Mentoring others	2
Mission	1
Teaching the Word	1

5. What do you think would help you to grow in that area?

Love & Compassion	Examples of brothers & sisters; brokenness in self and pride
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Closeness to God	Spiritual friends; silent retreat; practice of stillness & silence; spiritual mentor; being with like-minded friends who know God and how to get close to God; spiritual director as friend/companion/ mirror; meditate and act on Scripture; reflect God's goodness, God's speaking and working; memorize Scripture
Mentoring	Learn about spiritual direction and put into practice; form mentoring group outside the church
Mission	Connect with full-time missionaries; short-term missions
Teaching the Word	Praying, listening to Bible teachers and preachers; attending biblical classes.

6. When a crisis of faith hits for instance the Covid 19 pandemic, what help would you seek?

Friends & family	4
God - Prayer, God's word	16
Support & care from Christian community	3
Silent Retreat	2
Spiritual Director	5
Mentor	2
Pastor	1

7. Have you had any experience in receiving spiritual direction?

16 out of 20 participants responded they had experience in receiving spiritual direction.

8. If your answer is yes to the previous question, would you recommend spiritual direction to a fellow believer? Why? Or why not?

All would recommend spiritual direction to a fellow believer as they expressed the following:

- Yes! Because it's beneficial. Help us to see things in another perspective. Help us to focus on God and not on the storm.
- Yes. Because one may be too engrossed or overwhelmed with what is

happening in her life and may lose focus on what God might be doing in her life. She would need someone to help direct her focus to God.

- Yes. Spiritual direction can help believer deepen their relationship with God. Give space and time to believer to talk about their desire and struggle in the faith journey.
- Yes. Spiritual director guides me in having a deepening intimacy with God. Together with my spiritual director, she helps me to reflect on my walk of faith, appreciate and be thankful for God's provision. I am able to explore God's voice and purpose in my life.
- Yes. It is helpful to have a person to check in with and to discern a thought and my heart's intention. I feel comfortable talking to someone who is not always ready with an answer or a solution to my concerns but to have the leader to speak life and to direct me into uncovering what God might be saying to me.
- A definite yes, so that they would seek to know themselves and know what God is doing in their lives. That they would not rush to fix themselves and be busy with the next thing but to entrust themselves to God who is their ultimate director in their lives. Many have been badly affected by the values of the world and are not aware of that.
- Yes, if the person is open to share and receive guidance. It is beneficial to have a mature Christian to talk through things relating to my thoughts, responses and feelings. Also to have guidance on what God may be saying or leading in a situation which I may not be able to discern on my own.
- Yes. I would! I think having a companion for accountability and someone to co-discern and mirror my questions/comments and to also surface things that are at my blind spots is very important, especially sometimes when I get too carried away with a certain narrative or view I'm holding on to. So having someone to guide and co-discern is very helpful. Sometimes, I'm also unable to nail down the thoughts and emotions or perspectives that are swirling in my mind. Through the course of a spiritual direction session, the clarifications/questions posed help me express these in an articulated sentence, and that's often very liberating. Most importantly, even though the problems still exist or I may actually still feel downcast after the SD sessions, I can quite safely say I always feel encouraged and amazed - because everytime there's at least one thing that surfaces or an 'aha!' moment that I know it's God - this insight or encounter (not all the time there's an 'encounter' maybe, but maybe an insight or assurance) and of course having a mentor/SD taking time to journey with you also evoke feelings of gratitude that you are not alone. Actually it is also a great relief to have someone really attentively be present and listen.
- Yes. I believe that spiritual direction is an important part of Christian journey

with God. It keeps us focus on our spiritual journey and helps us enjoy God.

- Yes, but I would not say it is absolutely necessary. Yes only if one wants a person to speak with and be prayed for - a Pastor in church could also do. Yes if one is comfortable with talking about the specific issue that is in one's heart. *[This participant indicated that she only had experienced spiritual direction once at a silent retreat and it was limited to 3 minutes.]*
- Yes. Having a fellow sojourner on a faith journey, a trained pair of eyes and ears to listen in on God's heart helps me to see areas that I did not 'see'. In particular, the different tools used eg. through movies, nature, dreams, help me see aspects of God's hands that I would not have been ordinarily been open or exposed to.
- Yes, if you are certain that the spiritual direction is from God. Ask for multiple confirmations.
- Yes, I will recommend because spiritual direction helps one to grow in his or her relationship with God by providing a safe place to dialogue about one's lived experiences and to locate one's story (lived experiences) in God's story and God's work and presence in one's story.
- Definitely yes. Our lives have been steered so much by soulish means and guided by our five senses, we need to learn to seek God, His word and direction so that we don't simply make decisions with our own wisdom or experiences. In my own experiences, when God lead us, He often takes us out of our comfort zone, and put us in a position to trust God alone, sometimes against all common sense or logic. However, taking a leap of faith in obedience to such guidance often put us in the space of growth and the opportunity to see God's miracles and provisions.
- Yes, I would recommend this since it helps one to speak to another about one's spirituality, to reflect on one's faith and to refocus and position one's life towards God.
- Yes, I would recommend. All of us have blind spots, it is good to have a neutral party to listen to us and co-discern with us, and steer/point us to God to improve our relationship with God.
- I would recommend friends to go for spiritual direction as it helps us who are seeking or going through crisis to be attentive to God's personal communication with us and through discerning together (directee and director). The process enables us to realize who we are and who God is.

One participant who did not have experience in receiving spiritual direction also responded he would recommend it, stating:

- Yes. I would recommend it. For it will be a great help especially when we are in a cross road of our faith journey. It helps us to discern better the direction the Lord may be leading us when we are doubtful or unsettled. *[This participant stated that “there was an opportunity opened to me to receive spiritual direction but at that time I did not see the need and did not engage with the spiritual director.”]*

Alan Jamieson, *Summary of Faith Stages. Spirited Exchanges, 2005*

	Conventional faith expression	Transitioning	Post-conventional faith expression
BELIEFS	Focus on a black and white, right and wrong faith	Focus on the greys of faith and life	Focus on all shades of faith and life
STANCE	Dependence	Independence	Interdependence
QUESTIONS	Answers accepted	Searching and questioning, doubt and critique	Understanding and relishing of mystery, paradox and wonder
IMAGE OF GOD	Primary sense of relationship with God is hierarchical e.g. God's servant	Primary sense of relationship with God is relational e.g. God's friend (John 15)	Primary sense of relationship with God is intimate e.g. God's lover (Song of Songs)
IDENTITY	Socially constructed identity and roles	Formation of self identity and roles	Giving of self for others
FAITH COMPANION	Want someone to lean on e.g. a mentor or discipler	Want someone to encourage and legitimate their personal exploration e.g. a facilitator or sponsor.	Want a co-discerner of God's will and leading e.g. a spiritual director
AUTHORITY	Focus on external authority of leaders, the Bible and my community of faith	Focus on internal authority of self understanding, experience and self truth.	Focus on an integration of internal and external authorities of faith
DIRECTION	The Bible, faith community or leaders are the authors-of-my-faith and life. A need to listen to the external voice(s)	I am the author-of-my-faith and life. A need to listen to the internal voice(s)	The Spirit of God within me is the author-of-my-faith and life. A need to integrate external and internal voices.
STATUS QUO	Status quo confirmed	Status quo challenged	Status quo integrated into larger canvas
KEY LIFE QUESTION	What and how?	Why?	What is my contribution?
EXPRESSION	Specific personal examples	Hearing and telling our own stories	Working with metaphor, art and poetry

