

Being Directed by the Spirit

There is an ancient practice within Christianity called spiritual direction. It has developed through the generations as a way for one follower of Jesus to help another follower of Jesus draw closer to God by listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives.

I first encountered spiritual direction in seminary, meeting a director through one of my classes who introduced me to contemplative practices. Years later, as I was going through Covenant Orientation, I learned that North Park Theological Seminary had a certificate in spiritual direction through their C. John Weborg Center. At the time, I thought that might be something I would be interested in investigating and pursuing later in life. Then the pandemic happened and shut the world down.

During that still moment in history, as people were not gathering in large groups and local churches were trying to figure out how to continue their ministries, I began to notice something. I saw it in our church family, but also in the community as I offered individual counseling through Love INC to those who needed a spiritual guide through these unprecedented times: people had become restless and didn't trust those around them anymore. The world had become unsafe. We were all fracturing and fragmenting along lines of gathering or not gathering, virtual or in-person, restrictions or personal freedoms, masks or no masks, vaccines or no vaccines, Republican or Democrat, White Majority Culture or Black Lives Matter. I found that people within and outside the church were experiencing personal awakenings or crises, but they didn't feel comfortable talking about them with each other in their homes, at their work, or even in their faith communities. From my observation, the majority of people didn't want to just talk about a particular problem they were struggling with, they wanted to tell their story—their experience—and know that someone was listening, that someone could hold their stories well, and that God still loved them through these difficult days. That was when I decided to start pursuing training in spiritual direction.

I bring this up now to say that, this summer, I will be completing this program. It has been two and a half years of summer intensives and online practicums running consecutively since 2021. In 2016, I shared with you my road to ordination, and we celebrated together. I now invite you to celebrate with me this journey, milestone, and future ministry of spiritual direction.

In my own words, spiritual direction can be part of our deepening spiritual formation. It is for those who are looking to grow in prayer and to grow closer to God. It is a personal, intentional choice to enter a safe space where, with a spiritual companion, a person can share and explore their lived experience as a way to notice the movements of God and develop a greater awareness of God's self.

There is an interesting parallel to spiritual direction in what we read about John the Baptizer: “He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light, he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him” (John 1:7-10). In regard to spiritual direction, we acknowledge the true light is already in the world—and in our lives—but we don’t always recognize Jesus’s presence. Therefore, as we journey in spiritual direction, the director helps bear witness to the light.

If you would like to ask questions about spiritual direction, if you’re looking to be referred to a regular director, or if you would like an exploratory session with me, feel free to ask. Through these days of polarization, violence, and fragmentation, this is a way to be directed by God’s Spirit and to deepen our love for each other.

In celebration,

Pastor Chris