

### What is Spiritual Direction?

Within each of us lies the desire to find meaning beyond the moment... to discover our true selves... to grow closer to God and to one another. Spiritual direction can help you satisfy that longing.

We define Christian spiritual direction, then, 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 consequences of the relationship. The focus on this type of spiritual direction is on experience, not ideas, and specifically on religious experience.

- The Practice of Spiritual Direction, William Barry

Spiritual direction encourages you to discover and explore a closer relationship with God. In the midst of a busy life, many people find it difficult to notice God's action in their daily affairs. Yet, at the deepest level, all of us long for a more conscious experience of God's presence and love.

In spiritual direction, you reflect deeply on the experiences of your daily life and prayer. You grow in relation to God and recognize God's presence and grace in your life. You grow in the practical skills needed to pray and grow spirituality. You gain the ability to recognize interior movements towards and away from God. You grow in self awareness, recognize your gifts and areas in need of further growth.

You might come to spiritual direction for a variety of reasons, including to:

- Identify and trust your own experiences of God
- Integrate spirituality into your daily life
- Discern and make difficult choices
- Share struggles, losses or disappointments
- Find encouragement and affirmation
- Grow in relationship with God, self, others, and creation

Taken from 'Spiritual Directors International'

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...to see Jesus more clearly, to love him more dearly,  
and to follow him more nearly, day by day...

**Structure of the Spiritual Exercises**

Bookend

Four Books

Bookend

**Bookend: Principle and Foundation**

To seek and understand what life is about.

**First Week - Sin**

To realize I am a loved sinner through a review of your sin history in the light of God's love and mercy.

**Second Week - Life of Christ**

To hear and respond to God's call as I grow in heart-felt knowledge of Jesus.

**Third Week - Passion and Death of Jesus**

To be with Christ in His suffering and experience sorrow, anguish and compassion for Him.

**Fourth Week - Resurrection of Jesus**

To be with Christ in His joy and glory as I know Him in His appearances.

**Bookend: Contemplation to Obtain Love**

To become more aware of God's gracious love in the gifts of life and to serve God out of gratitude.

**Outcomes:**

- Discovering who I really am
- Directing myself toward God
- Noticing God's action in my life
- Responding to the movements of my heart
- Discovering the nature of my deepest desire
- Seeking God's will
- Becoming free of all that distracts me from my deepest desire
- Making choices in line with my truest self
- Connecting my lived experience with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ
- Responding to God's love for me
- Finding God in all things

- Taken from Inner Compass, Margaret Silf

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## THE FIRST PRINCIPLE AND FOUNDATION

*The goal of our life is to live with God forever.*

*God, who loves us, gave us life.*

*Our own response of love allows God's life  
to flow into us without limit.*

*All the things in this world are gifts of God,  
presented to us so that we can know God more easily  
and make a return of love more readily.*

*As a result, we appreciate and use all these gifts of God  
insofar as they help us develop as loving persons.  
But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives,  
they displace God  
and so hinder our growth toward our goal.*

*In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance  
before all of these created gifts  
insofar as we have a choice  
and are not bound by some obligation.*

*We should not fix our desires on health or sickness,  
wealth or poverty,*

*success or failure,*

*a long life or a short one.*

*For everything has the potential of calling forth in us  
a deeper response to our life in God.*

*Our only desire and our one choice should be this:*

*I want and I choose what better leads*

*to the deepening of God's life in me.*

*-- St. Ignatius of Loyola, The Spiritual Exercises  
Paraphrased by David Fleming, SJ*

## **How A Trappist Expresses the First Principle and Foundation!**

### **Two thoughts from Thomas Merton**

**We are what we love.**

**If we love God, in whose image we were created, we discover ourselves in him and we cannot help being happy: we have already achieved something of the fullness of being for which we were destined in our creation.**

**If we love everything else but God, we contradict the image born in our very essence, and we cannot help being unhappy, because we are living a caricature of what we are meant to be.**

*-- The Waters of Siloe*

**To say that I am made in the image of God is to say that love is the reason for my existence, for God is love.**

**Love is my true identity. Selflessness is my true self. Love is my character. Love is my name.**

**If, therefore, I do anything or think anything or say anything or know anything that is not purely for the love of God, it cannot give me peace, or rest, or fulfillment, or joy.**

**To find love I must enter into the sanctuary where it is hidden, which is the mystery of God.**

*-- New Seeds of Contemplation*

Ignatius of Loyola - 1491 to 1556

About his conversion -

- In the military and on his way to fame
- Cannon ball shattered his leg
- For vanity sake he had multiple operations w/out anesthesia
- While recuperating read about the life of Christ & lives of the saints
- Discovered a lingering joy and delight after reading their stories
- Conversion - saw vision of the Mother of God
- Made a pilgrimage to her shrine
- Ran into a Moor who was disrespectful of our Lady. Experienced tremendous anger and allowed his mule's choice between paths to be the discernment to kill or not kill him.
- Spent time in a cave where he prayed & fasted
- It was from the experience in this cave he wrote the Spiritual Exercises. They were written over a period of about 25 years.
- His Spirituality is expressed in the Jesuit motto 'for the greater glory of God'
- He reinterprets the focus of the spiritual journey from the purifying ascent of the soul to the divine to the obedient descent of the disciple into the ever greater love of Christ's own mission.
- Key to his method is what is learned when one examines the participation of the saints in the interior life of Christ.
- Ignatius fixes on the praise, reverence and service of God as man's end
- By means of the exercises all obstacles are removed so man is disposed to receive God's will.
- Method of prayer is to seek and find God in all things. In particular to discover the voice of God within one's own heart and experience a growth in understanding of God's will - as one grows intimate with God.

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## Overview of the Spiritual Exercises

*Annotation 1: By the term "Spiritual Exercises" is meant every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer, and of other spiritual activities that will be mentioned later. For just as taking a walk, journeying on foot, and running are bodily exercises, so we call Spiritual Exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul.*

The *Spiritual Exercises* and "An Ignatian Spiritual Experience" are based on four assumptions:

1. God creates the universe precisely in order to invite us into relationship with Him.
  - God is always communicating to us who God is.
  - God desires us and works to draw us into a reciprocal conscious relationship with Him.
2. We are called to respond to God's self-communication, but we are not always alert to the presence of God in our lives.
  - The *Spiritual Exercises* heighten our awareness of God's presence.
3. The most important prerequisite for using the *Exercises* is a desire to become more aware of the presence of God in our lives and to develop a conscious relationship with Him.
  - No advanced spiritual life is necessary for doing the *Exercises*.
4. Another prerequisite for using the *Exercises* is the ability to notice and talk about what happens interiorly while we are doing them.
  - Noticing and talking with others helps us to become more aware of God's movement in our lives.

Taken from Finding God in All Things, William A. Barry, S.J.

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## 8-Week Ignatian Retreat

### Ignatian Contemplation

*Through the use of our senses and the aid of our imaginations Ignatius provides a method for opening ourselves to experience deeply what it is to know, love and follow Jesus in our own lives.*

How do we start? First we get settled in a comfortable chair and in a quiet place where we won't be distracted. Our first gesture might be to open our hands on our lap, and to ask God to open our hearts and imaginations.

Then pick a story out of scripture. Read through it once slowly and put it down. Now we begin to imagine the scene as if we are standing right there. What is around me? Who else is there? What do I hear in the scene? If I am in a house, what noises are in the house or in the street outside? What are the smells I can pick up?

Now we begin to imagine the scene we read about. Who is in it? What conversation takes place? What is the mood - tense? joyful? confused? angry?

Feel free to paint this picture in any way your imagination takes you. If we worry about historical accuracy, it can be a distraction that takes us away from prayer. This isn't scripture - this is letting God take our imaginations and reveal to us something of the intimate life of Jesus or others. If, in our prayer, Mary pulls the toddler Jesus onto her lap to tie his shoes or zip his coat, we can let it happen that way. We don't want to fret about the historically accurate kinds of food served at a dinner or what kind of carpenter tools Joseph might have really had in his workshop. Here is an experience of prayer that lets our imaginations free themselves from anything that limits them. This is God revealing himself to us.

It helps if we imagine Jesus and his disciples as the real people they were who walked the earth. St. Ignatius imagined that the first person Jesus appeared to after the Resurrection was his mother and he encourages us to picture Jesus appearing at home to Mary, watching the joy and emotion in the scene.

- Taken from 'How Do We Pray With Our Imagination?', Creighton University

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## Who is Jesus?

Imagine your own personal encounter and conversation with Jesus and prayerfully reflect on the following questions as you begin to discover **who Jesus is for you and how you think about him:**

- How would you describe the way Jesus looks and acts, the way his voice sounds, the way he smiles and laughs?
- What do you notice about Jesus' personality? What is it about him that attracts or draws you to spend time with him?
- How human is Jesus for you? What feelings does Jesus experience – sorrow, discouragement, disappointment, loneliness, happiness, joy? Does he feel the need for friends to confide in and support him or is his one-on-one relationship with the Father all that he needs?
- How does Jesus make other people feel, especially his closest friends and those who are marginalized?
- How does Jesus make you feel? Do you want to know him more intimately? Would you want to vacation with him?
- Jesus offers us his friendship. How do you see yourself responding to Jesus' invitation to friendship with you? What changes might you need to make in your life if you accept his invitation?



### Practical Suggestions For Prayer - Seven P's

What can we do to let God communicate Himself more fully & freely to us?

**Period** - Try to be faithful to at least 30 minutes to an hour daily of being alone with God. Try to make room for this at a regular time each day.

**Passage** - Pick a passage from Scripture before beginning prayer. Pick a favorite psalm, parable, story or let it fit your mood or need. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to the passage. For the Spiritual Exercises refer to the prayer assignment. Put a marker in the page to keep it ready.

**Place** - Find a private space where you can be alone with God. It is good to be in a church or at home - but if the people you are with inhibit or distract you from what you feel like doing, pick a place where you are alone and uninhibited to react to God's presence.

**Posture** - At the beginning of prayer take time to settle yourself peacefully. We are humans with bodies and posture is important. Do you pray better kneeling, or do you feel more receptive and open to God's presence when sitting with a cup of coffee in your hand. St. Ignatius preferred lying down and recommends we try it. Try different postures and find one that is most conducive for responding to God's presence - this may vary day to day and within the same prayer period.

**Presence** - Peacefully remind yourself how present God is in you and all around you. Let your senses come alive (e.g. feel your pulse, touch anything near, see colors, hear sounds, smell the air). Take time out in prayer to do this, and don't rush through it - it is important. In these moments God's communication may come with a deep personal sense of God's presence. Stay with it and let it hold you until it fades.

**Pray** - Pray for a grace either specified or from your own desires. Pray from the Scripture passage. Scripture is the living Word of the living God. It is alive now - God is present and wants to communicate to us. Turn to the selected passage and read it very slowly aloud. Pray the passage by listening carefully and peacefully to it. Read it or whisper it in a rhythm with your breathing - one phrase at a time. Don't intellectualize it by looking for implications, lessons, profound thoughts, conclusions, resolutions etc... Just relax as a child would listen to a story on their parent's lap.

**Pause** - Pause at any part of the passage that evokes a feeling in you, either negative or positive. Be free to pause or repeat when and where you feel like it.

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**Review of Prayer / Journaling**

The purpose of this kind of reflection is to increase your awareness of the ways in which God is active in your life and of your own response to that activity.

Look back over your prayer time to see what you experienced and jot down your reflections in your journal. Ask yourself questions like these:

1. How did I feel during this time of prayer?
  - a. Was I in harmony within myself and with God or was I feeling disturbed?
  - b. Did the time pass quickly or was I struggling to stay with it?
  
2. Did anything particularly strike me in what I was using as a focus for my prayer?
  - a. Was there anything in the passage that stood out in some way?
  - b. Was there anything that caused a negative or positive reaction in me?
  
3. Can I make any connections between what has come up in my prayer and what is happening in my life, or in the life of the world in which I live?
  
4. Did the prayer leave me enlightened or challenged in any particular way?
  
5. What was the one most significant aspect of the prayer?
  - a. For what gift, granted in prayer, do I most wish to thank God?
  - b. Is there one thing I would like to go back to or carry with me into my day?

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## The Words Of Jesus

*(it is best to have someone else assisting in the saying of these words to provide a second voice)*

Hear now the words of Jesus spoken to each one of us.

Jesus says:

My peace I give to you.

Do not be afraid.

I call you my friend.

Abide in my love.

Even the hairs of your head  
are numbered.

Follow me.

I am the way for you.

I am the life for you.

I am the truth for you.

Blessed are your eyes for  
they see.

You are my witness.

You are my brother.

I am hungry, give me food.

I am in prison, come to me.

I am thirsty, give me drink.

I am a stranger, welcome me.

I am naked, clothe me.

I am sick, visit me.

Abide in me and I in you.

I will drink wine with you in the  
Kingdom of God

You will shine like the sun.

You are in me and I in you.

Ask and it will be given you.

Seek and you will find.

Knock and the door will be  
opened to you.

I am the vine, you are the branch.

I will give you rest.

You are the light of the world.

You are the salt of the earth.

You are my sister.

Give and it will be given to you.

Love others as I have loved you.

The truth will make you free.

Feed my sheep.

Watch and pray.

I am with you always.

*(Many other words of Jesus can be appropriately included, but it is advisable to keep to as simple a phrase as possible and to maintain direct speech in the sayings)*



Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

-- Luke 5:1-11



