



178: How to Find A Spiritual Director

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 178. This is a podcast about making decisions, but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful, but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step.

But first, a word from this episode's sponsor. Skillshare. Here in the Northern hemisphere, it seems as if nature has transformed overnight from a sleepy winter hibernation to a colorful and lively celebration. Are you feeling that itch for a change of pace too? Skillshare can help. Witness your own transformation as you turn small steps into giant leaps in creative areas in your life with Skillshare's catalog of classes that can help you explore new interests and make progress in topics that matter to you. One class that I think you'll enjoy is Video for Instagram by Hallease Narvaez, a digital storyteller and video producer. Hallease has a refreshing outlook on self-expression and storytelling. And I love how she focuses on creativity and experimentation instead of fancy cameras and equipment. She even walks us through different filming and editing techniques so we can build our competence while using a medium that may be new to us.

Skillshare makes working towards a creative goal, achievable with short lessons and hands-on projects. And it's affordable too with annual subscriptions available for less than \$10 a month. Right now, Next Right Thing listeners can get a free trial of premium membership at [skillshare.com/nextrightthing](https://www.skillshare.com/nextrightthing). Explore your unlimited trial access to classes like video for Instagram, for free just for being here with me today. Go to [skillshare.com/nextrightthing](https://www.skillshare.com/nextrightthing) to claim your premium trial or tap the link in today's show notes. Now on today's episode, listen in.

Well, if you read the title of this episode and you've never heard of spiritual direction, I would recommend that you pause this one. And first listen to episode 167 before continuing on, because this one is kind of a part two to that episode. That one is called Spiritual Direction for Beginners. And in that episode, I share what spiritual direction is and how it's different from, and sometimes similar to, discipleship, mentoring, coaching, counseling, or pastoral care. I want to be sure to mention this is a specific episode about a specific practice. It is not meant to encompass all possible resources available to us as people of faith. I am answering a specific question that I've been asked many, many times. So I ask for grace in my inability to give you a thorough list of every possible resource available to us, this is not meant to necessarily cover all the bases, but to offer some principles and some practical places to look for how to find a spiritual director.

This is also not meant to be replacement for anything in your life, but this is just me sharing with you something that has been deeply meaningful for me personally, and a kind gift from God in my own spiritual walk. Now I have my master's degree in Christian spiritual formation. And what that means for me is that I'm deeply invested in the inner lives of people. I take seriously the invitation of Jesus to invite everyone to the table, to remove obstacles that might be standing in the way between you and the heart of God. And I'm especially grateful for how this contemplative posture of spiritual direction has drawn me closer to God, has allowed scripture to come even more alive for me and has helped me to see all the ways in which the spirit is always present, always active and always kind.

Now this is not to be seen as a replacement for church or personal Bible study or any other spiritual practice that you engage in. But it is one of many practices that we can engage in, in order to be transformed, in order to learn and grow and deepen our faith. A spiritual director is not a conduit between you and God. That is a misconception, a misunderstanding. And if that's what you hear when you hear the term spiritual director, well, I hope you'll keep listening because that's not what it is at all. By way of review in its simplest form, a spiritual director is just a person who holds prayerful space for someone else, to help them discern what God is up to in and around them.

They are not pastors, coaches, teachers, or therapists, although many spiritual directors also hold those roles as well. But the art of spiritual direction stands on its own. And the task of the spiritual director is not to literally direct a person, which is often a misconception about spiritual directors, but to remain attentive to the spirit of God on behalf of someone else. A spiritual director is like a co-listener, kind of like a spiritual friend. God is the director. And the process of spiritual direction is a practice of simply helping people become aware of what God is up to in their lives.

So in today's episode, I want to answer another frequently asked question that I wasn't able to get to in episode 167. And that is how can I find a spiritual director? Well, just like anything, I want to make sure that you're asking the right questions first. When I talk to someone who wants to, for example, start a podcast. A lot of times, their first questions are about microphones and recording equipment, but that's the easy part. Before sharing with them about how to start a podcast, it's important to say, listen, you have to be able to say why you want to start a podcast in the first place. Well, the same thing goes for any other thing we're doing in life, including looking for a spiritual director. So before I share with you where to look, there are a few things I want to ask you.

First of all, it's important to know why. Why do you want to find a spiritual director? Now there's no wrong answer here, but I still think it's important to have one. For me, seven years ago, when I started meeting with my spiritual director, it was a combination of I was in the midst of a major life transition. I was longing for some spiritual friendship. I was doing a lot more writing and speaking publicly. And I was really wanting to meet with someone who had no idea who I was. I wanted to be kind of anonymous and I had a desire to deepen my relationship with God. So that was my why at the time. Now, could I have met with a pastor, or a mentor or a teacher? Sure, absolutely. I could have. I chose not to.

I chose to look for a spiritual director because for me that I knew when I met with the spiritual director, I was going to find someone who didn't necessarily have an agenda for me. They were probably going to listen more than they were going to speak and I knew it was going to be someone who would have a posture of prayer. And that was the most important thing for me. So I'll just pose the question back to you.

Why do you want to find a spiritual director?

Well, secondly, as you answer that question, you might also want to consider what matters most to you. There are lots of things to consider when looking for a spiritual director and I'll name one, two, three, four, five, seven of them, let's say.

So first of all, you might just want to simply decide, is it really important to me to meet with someone in person or am I willing to meet with someone remotely, either via Skype or Zoom? I know we've all gotten used to that now, but for you, that might be a factor. So you want to consider what is really important to you or what's most important to you there?

The second thing to consider is do I want to meet one-on-one with a spiritual director or am I maybe open to or interested in group spiritual direction? Which is a very similar practice, but of course it's done in a small group of people.

Another thing that you might want to consider is does the age or gender of the spiritual director matter to you? It might not, but if you show up at your appointment and your spiritual director is 25, does that matter to you? Maybe. Maybe not. So that's a good question to answer before you go looking for a spiritual director.

Another really important thing to consider is, is it important to you, of highest importance to you that your spiritual director is someone who comes from either the same denomination as you or the same faith background as you.

Next, you might want to consider the training and or the specialties that the spiritual director has. For example, some directors got a degree in spiritual direction, maybe an undergraduate degree or a master's degree. Others may have a certificate of spiritual direction, which is pretty common. And then some people have just been practicing spiritual direction for 25 years, and it's a tradition they grew up with. And it's one that they feel called to, and they're just excellent listeners. And they sit with people and that can also be something that could be really useful for you. But you need to decide what's important to you as someone who's going to trust as you walk with Jesus, and you trust someone else to hold that space for you, consider their training, and their specialties and what really resonates with you.

Another thing to consider is many spiritual directors have a particular focus, or maybe even a particular demographic of people that they meet with. For example, my husband offers spiritual direction for young men, usually in their 20s and 30s, the first half of life. And he sits with them often, sometimes even couples. And so similar to counselors, spiritual directors have specific topics that they focus on. Maybe they talk about transitions or they work with pastors and people who do the work of pastors, or people in business, or the elderly or students. So usually on their websites, they'll list all of those specialties out or their focuses but that's another thing to consider.

Well, finally, that question that you're probably really here for, which is okay, so how do I practically find one? Well once you've answered your why and you've discerned what matters most to you, one place you could start is a website called sdicompanions.org or Spiritual Directors International. That's probably the largest directory that I know of, but be aware this is a global and inclusive resource. And that means that you're going to find resources from all different streams of faith, including faith traditions that you might

not be familiar with, you might not understand or agree with.

So listen, put on your Next Right Thing hat, do your research, know what matters to you, use their search function on the website to screen for what you're looking for. So for example, they have search parameters that are pretty distinct and you can search for exactly what you want. For example, there are 4,002 resources labeled Christian, but as you click on those, you can discern exactly kind of what you're looking for. You can search based on proximity, experience or focus, many different things. Once you pick criteria that matter to you and your search results come up, you'll be able to read profiles of various directors, many of them will have a website, go to that website sight, read it, click it, learn and discern.

If you come from an evangelical tradition, another site that could be helpful for you is graftedlife.org. They have a directory of spiritual directors who engage their work in practice on the basis of an evangelical theology.

Now not all spiritual directors are listed on either one of these sites, but they are a good place to start. If one of the things that matters most to you is that your spiritual director share your faith tradition. Then you could simply Google spiritual direction, plus your faith tradition and see if any results come up. You might even want to search based on location if one of the things that matters to you is that you can meet this person face-to-face or in real life. For example, if you're in the US, in the Pacific Northwest area, I think there's a website called soulformation.org. That's one resource for searching for a spiritual director. Again, I can't vouch for any of these particular spiritual directors, but I trust that you'll go there, you'll click around, you'll use your own wisdom and discernment and you'll prayerfully consider if there might be someone there that could be a good fit. You could also search your city or state and see what comes up as well.

But like I said, use discernment just like you would for any other resource book, counselor or church. You don't just trust the first one you find. You have to read and pray, listen, pay attention, learn what you can, email someone, get on the phone, ask questions, call, and then do the next right thing. Use all these next right thing principles.

And then finally, and this one's important so don't overlook it. Be patient and kind. And when I say that, I mean to yourself. Just like any relationship you really have to consider fit. The first time you meet with a spiritual director, it might be wonderful or it might be weird. There will probably be more silence than you're used to, or they might talk more than you expect. Even if you think you don't have any expectations going in, you probably do. So notice how you respond on the inside and don't be afraid to ask questions. Have them tell you about how they define spiritual direction, ask them how long they've been practicing the art of spiritual direction, ask them their own faith tradition. And if it's different from yours, be sure they're comfortable meeting with someone from a different tradition than they are.

For example, they might come from an Episcopalian tradition and maybe you come from a Baptist tradition. Is that a problem for either one of you? Talk about it and see. Ask them if they receive spiritual direction as well, just like counselors need counseling, spiritual directors need spiritual directors. Well, if you're new to spiritual direction, it's been around for hundreds of years in the church. It's not new. It's not fancy. It's a practice that I've grown to love and respect, not because necessarily of the practice itself. Just like anything, any spiritual discipline, any spiritual practice, it's never about the practice. It's always about union with God. It's always about connection in the spirit. I've grown closer to God by having a kind

listener sit with me without an agenda. Listen to me, pray with, and for me and always bring me back to Jesus. That's the true job of a spiritual director.

If you've been lonely in your spiritual life, if you've been carrying questions or disappointment, or if you've simply been wanting to slow down and deepen your faith, spiritual direction could be something you might like to add to your rhythm of life. As you consider your next right thing, may you be keenly aware of God's presence with you and within you, may you have courage to ask for what you need, may you have discernment to know what to do next, may you have the wisdom to let go of some things and to make room for a new curiosity that might be stirring in your soul. From Psalm 46 in the message version. "God is a safe place to hide, ready to help when we need him. We stand fearless at the cliff edge of doom, courageous in sea, storm and earthquake, before the rush and roar of oceans, the tremors that shift mountains. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God."

Thanks for listening to episode 178 of The Next Right Thing.

I hope this simple practice of finding a spiritual director can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Because while it's true this is a podcast about making decisions, you know, the bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives. As always, you can find me on Instagram at Emily P. Freeman and online at emilypfreeman.com where we've been doing some rearranging on the website. And so if you've gone there recently to find the transcripts, I see you, I hear you. And if it's not fixed yet, it will be fixed soon. We've had a little trouble getting our transcripts moved over. Today's episode transcript should be ready to go. But if you're looking for past transcripts, well, those may be ready to go too, but be patient and check back if they're not.

Well in closing, once again, Psalm 46, but now at the end of the chapter in the NIV. He says, "Be still and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth." Thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.