

Love the Lord with your Heart in Mutual Spiritual Direction:

Process Adapted by John McNally for Acadia Divinity College's Mentored Ministry Peer Groups

The purpose of group spiritual direction is to provide a place where individuals can experience what it means to be listened to and loved by others, so that they can learn to listen more attentively to God in their daily lives and be used by God to spread God's grace and love throughout the world... In group spiritual direction the goal is not to answer life's questions. The goal is to draw closer to God in the midst of the questions. Many times it is in embracing our questions that we move more deeply into God's love... One of the greatest gifts we can give another is to ask a meaningful question. With our questions, we are inviting further exploration into whatever the directee is presenting.¹

Group Spiritual Direction Process²



1. **Silent & Still with Scripture (5 minutes):** "...whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water..." (Psalm 1:2-3) "Be still in the presence of the LORD and wait patiently for him to act." (Psalm 37:7) "...a time to be silent and a time to speak..." (Ecclesiastes 3:7)

2. **Explore Heart-Level (10 minutes + ~5 response):** "Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart... Trust in him at all times you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. *Selah*" (Psalm 37:4, 62:8) "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

3. **Listen Deeply (periodic *Selah* pauses ~5 minutes):** "...Go near to listen... do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God... let your words be few." (Ecclesiastes

¹ Alice Fryling, *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 8, 45-46.

² Originally inspired by the outline presented in Leadership Transformation's *Selah* Certificate Program in Spiritual Direction (<http://www.leadershiptransformations.org/selah.htm>). The *Selah* program name and methodology references the biblical word *selah*, and roots spiritual direction's core process as one of pausing to notice the presence and voice of God more deeply when in prayerful conversation together. The SELAH acronym as presented here, and its step-by-step group direction outline, are my own original work, created as a way of shaping a group direction experience around the principles and processes that the *Selah* program teaches. The table about questions adds reflections and adaptations from the *Selah* training and draws from Fryling's wisdom on how "some questions are simply not helpful." Fryling, 53-54. For other approaches to group direction: Rose Mary Dougherty, ed., *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2003). Marlene Kropf and Daniel Schrock, eds., *An Open Place: The Ministry of Group Spiritual Direction*. (New York: Church Publishing, 2012).

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5:1-3) “The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.” (Isaiah 50:4) “...You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.” (James 1:19, NLT) The Bible teaches us to be open to God’s guidance and to be discerning: “test them all; hold on to what is good, reject whatever is harmful.” (1 Thessalonians 5:15-24). Discernment is a general responsibility (1 John 4:1) and a specific gift (1 Corinthians 12:10) used with other gifts (wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, etc.).

- As you listen in light of the Scriptures above and the Spirit within, what are you noticing inwardly about what is stirring in you with images, impressions, sense of the situation, intuition, etc.?
- The Chinese character for listening includes several ideas and images: ears, eyes, heart, undivided attention. As you listen in all these ways with your whole self, what are you noticing outwardly about how the person is coming across in sharing his/her heart?
- As you listen, internally sift or weigh insights (1 Corinthians 14:29) for evocative explorations for the person to align with the Spirit of truth guiding into all truth and revealing Christ (John 16:12-15).



4. **Ask Evocative Questions (~3 minutes):** ““But what about you?” [Jesus] asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’” (Luke 9:20) “...but the LORD was not in the wind...not in the earthquake...not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper... ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” (1 Kings 19:11-13) “The purposes of the human heart are deep waters, but those who have insight draw them out.” (Proverbs 20:5)

- Inwardly check the content and tone of your question for consistency with how much it seems unified with the Spirit’s leading of the other, humble, gentle, patient, loving, peaceful, etc., (Ephesians 4:2-3).
- Perceptions or questions may be for silent prayer and not to share. Paul prayed for love, knowledge, “depth of insight” and the ability for others “to discern what is best...” (Philippians 1:9-11).
- Track with the group conversation and discernment, so that your question or comment fits with the present moment with the joy of an apt reply and the goodness of a timely word (Proverbs 15:23).
- Inwardly check the consistency of your question with evocative explorations described in the table below and contrasted with the content and tone of interpretative intrusions. Do NOT interrupt.

Impose Interpretative Questions	Vs. Ask Evocative Questions (<i>Selah Core Values</i>) ³
1. Interpretative Intrusions (Besides questions, may be advice, explanation...)	1. Evocative Explorations (Besides questions, may be a brief reflection, a noticing, a return to silence...)
2. Shift to my agenda & my story	2. Sift with <i>God-awareness</i> & honour mystery
3. Shut down uncomfortable feelings or thoughts by staying shallow	3. Open up deeper feelings or thoughts, with <i>self-awareness</i> , even if uncomfortable
4. Curiosity about “juicy” details in a “drama”	4. Clarity: “ <i>holy interest</i> ” in vital details with God
5. Instruction to teach content about God	5. Invitation to meet God & reflect on experience
6. Constrictive, stifling, fixated on problems	6. Contemplative, spacious, <i>freedom & flexibility</i>
7. Labelling: an attitude with a platitude	7. Listening with <i>love & respect</i>
8. Performance pressure that may raise stress or anxiety for director &/or directee	8. Presence that is a non-anxious, relaxed way of director being with the directee in <i>trust</i>
9. Correction of “wrong” answers	9. Companion of person without “judging”
10. Head-level intellectual analysis	10. Heart-level soul engagement

5. **In God’s Hand (2 minutes of silent or one-line prayers):** “I cling to you; your right hand upholds me ...even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.” (Psalm 63:8, 139:10) “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” (1 Peter 5:6) If time allows at the end of round one for an individual, you may pause for a round two where the group listens to how the Spirit is speaking to the group not only as individuals but as a group experiencing God’s hand.

³ The words *in italics* are taken from the original *Selah Core Values* document, © Angela Dean Wisdom, 2016, for Leadership Transformation’s *Selah Certificate Program in Spiritual Direction* (<http://www.leadershiptransformations.org/selah.htm>).