

The Art of Soul Care: Faith and Discernment

By Betsy Barber

Speaker 1:

Just as the nights before, what I'd like you to do is, we just want to take a moment to open our heart just a little bit to one another and, and to the Lord. And so introduce yourself to the person next to you, um, again in, just in groups of two or three. Take a moment to introduce yourself, but then I want you to go right to prayer and just pray for the other that the Lord would open their heart to whatever the spirit would have from Dr. Barber tonight. So take a moment.

[audience talking]

Matthew Hooper has his dog here. [laughs] Okay. Why don't we begin. Just a couple of announcements before I introduce our speaker. Um, the campus safety, for some reason, they can't open up the doors below uh Feinberg for bathrooms. So if, you if you need to go to the restroom, go to Myers Hall, the Talbot, or you can go right across the quad here to the library. Um, also, we, uh, the tapes are available for those who've ordered them or want to, um, the media center over in the library. And again, my, my session didn't come out. So uh, I really don't want to do it over again, but I'll do it somewhere, I suppose. Um, but if any of you taped that session, uh, please see me and, and let me know, um, if that's available. Otherwise, I'll, I'll find a time, I suppose. Dr. Demarest, he had left before we could get a copy of that. So Debbie is going to uh, get from that, from him, an email on that. So we'll just distribute that ourself to all of you. Yeah. So there'll be a handout. Hopefully we'll have that uh next week, uh, when Venner comes. Well, let me introduce our speaker. This is Dr. Betsy Barber, and she is the associate professor of

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spirituality and psychology at our Institute for Spiritual Formation. She's also the director of the Center for Spiritual Renewal. We have at Biola, we have, uh, the Biola Counseling Center, which gives psychological services. Well Betsy is the director of our Center for Spiritual Renewal; students can come for spiritual direction.

And so that has been a large ministry that the institute has taken on. We're, uh, Dr. Barber and Dr. TenElsof helped to train all of our students in spiritual direction and mentoring. And right now, this semester, our students are seeing probably about a little over four hundred undergraduates and graduates and pastors in spiritual direction. And they're getting supervision and training from Dr. Barber in that. So that, that's a main part of our program. Um, Dr. Barber is also, her Ph.D. is in clinical psychology from Rosemead School of Psychology. So she has, she's bringing these two worlds of clinical psychology therapy with spiritual direction and spirituality together. She's also served with her husband on the mission field for a number of years and she'll probably share some of those stories. So if you would, why don't you welcome Dr. Barber?

[audio skips]

Betsy Barber:

I actually, want to start with a quote here tonight from uh, from John Stott, one of my all time favorites. I heard this man at Urbana 70, and was so impressed with him years and years ago, John Stott, uh, tells us that we can become a Christian in a moment, but not a mature Christian. Christ can enter, cleanse, forgive you in a matter of seconds, but it will take much longer for

your character to be transformed and molded to his will. It only takes a few minutes for a bride and a bridegroom to be married, but in the rough and tumble of their home, it may take many years for two strong wills to be dovetailed into one. So when we receive Christ, a moment of commitment will lead to a lifetime of adjustment. And that process of adjustment between ourselves and the lover of our soul is, is our topic for tonight. Um, that's what we're going to talk about. The reason you're here tonight is because you're drawn to the Lord Jesus. You're here because you love him. You want to know more about him. You're attracted to him. You care about him and his will and his person, and the Lord Jesus is the object of your affection. He's the one whom you love and who you want to get to know better. And that's why you're here, because you are drawn to the Lord Jesus. You are also here tonight because you are drawn by the Lord Jesus. He's the one who has invited you to walk with him. He initiated the relationship. He called you by name; he loves you. You're his beloved.

Now, stop and consider this for just a minute. Sit with that. I'm drawn to the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus draws me. I'm drawn by the Lord Jesus. And notice this two way inclination. He calls, you answer. He draws, you're drawn. He invites, and you said yes. Yes, here I am. You see him, and he's found by you. And he seeks you, and you let yourself be found. You say yes. Now what we've just done ,this noticing, what the Lord's done, what my response is; what I do, what his response is. That noticing is the heart of soul care. It's the heart of the type of soul care, the subtype of soul care that's called spiritual direction. We notice. We attend in the presence of, we attend to the presence of God in another person's life. We attend to their response to his presence. And then we reflect back their response to them. That's the core right there. You get that, you've got what we're talking about tonight. Now, there are lots of biblical examples of this kind of, uh,

interaction. One of my personal favorites, uh, is the boy, Samuel and Eli. Remember, Samuel ended up in the temple being raised, the scripture tells us in the presence of the Lord. And he was, uh, sleeping one night, he heard someone call him. He thought it was the old priest Eli. He ran and said, yes, here I am, what did you want? And Eli's like, go back to bed, boy. And that happened back and forth. And finally, Eli went, oh, next time, say, here I am, Lord, your servants hearing. I'm listening. And, uh, so Samuel did that.

When I was a little kid, I felt a special affection to Samuel because uh, my parents had trouble conceiving children and, and carrying them to birth, and I was the first one they got. And my mother had prayed Hannah's prayer. And so I was like, I'm like Samuel. And I knew that from when I was tiny. So I used to lie in bed at night and go speak, Lord your servant's listening. And then I'd listen really hard, [laughs] but that's an example of this spiritual direction relationship we're talking about, the one between Samuel and Eli. Um, God with Adam and Eve in the garden when they were hiding from him is an example. Uh, Jesus with the woman at the well, Jesus with Nicodemus, which was the first Nick at Nite.

[audience laughs]

Um, Paul with Timothy is a good example. Daniel and the king's dreams is an example. Here's what God's doing in your life, here's what he's saying to you, now here's how you're responding. Look at that. So in soul care, we focus on people's prayer lives. We focus on their intimate knowing of God, on their relationship with them. We focus how they talk to him, and listen to them and how he responds back. And we're on really good sound biblical, um, footing here. In

Acts two forty-two, we're told that the early church devoted themselves to four things. They had four foci. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. In spiritual direction, we're devoting ourselves to prayer. We're focusing on that. God's always seeking us. We are the object of his desire. Our maker delights in us. And as we mature in faith, we become more and more aware of being sought. We're more sure of it. And we answer him, and he seeks us and we stop hiding. We say, here I am. Come and find me.

When I was a little kid, my dad would come home from work, and he came home about the same time, uh, every night. And I would hide cause I knew he was coming, and he'd come upstairs and he'd, you know, greet my mom, kiss her and say, Where's Betsy? And then they'd go through the house looking. It was this ritual we had when I was little kid. Betsy, where's Betsy? Well, a lot of times I couldn't wait for him to find me. You know, I'd jump out, here I am Dad, here I am!

Because I loved him and I wanted to be with him.

Unlike Adam and Eve in the garden when the Lord went walking in the evening and they start hiding, you know, different, different reactions. So we're the object of God's desire. He seeks us, and we respond to his seeking. Now, those of us who are spiritual directors who are in soul care are inquisitive. We have a holy curiosity. We wonder about things. And we notice things in the presence of other folks. Um, we know that these folks are joined to the Holy Spirit, and we want to look at that relationship. We're on sound theological footing here. Um, two of my favorite passages. First Corinthians six seventeen says, but he who has joined himself to Christ has become one with Him in spirit. Remember Dallas Willard's diagram, how at the core of our beings we're one with the Lord Jesus unified in his Holy Spirit? That's what I'm talking about here. Jesus talks to his disciples about this, uh during the Last Supper, during that discourse.

And, um, Jesus' best friend, John, tells us what he said in John fourteen. He says that Jesus promised that all three members of the Trinity will come and make their home in us believers. I want to read these verses to you. Uh, fourteen sixteen to seventeen, I will ask the Father and he will give you another counselor to be with you forever, the spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. And a little further on, verse twenty-three, Jesus replied, if anybody loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home in him.

Okay, we could camp out here all night long. Think about it. All three members of the Trinity made their home in us. Our spirit is united with the Holy Spirit. Discernment, which we're gonna talk about in a minute, is the ability to perceive this reality. To see the reality of the indwelling Holy Spirit and what he's doing in a person's life. To know him. However, we're not often aware of his presence in us, with us. Why? Why don't we experience that oneness? The things that stand in the way of that experience of oneness with our Lord Jesus, or the growth or formation that needs to happen in order for us to have that union with the Lord, that's the working platform of soul care. Now, we know the union is a done deal when we believe on the holy, on the Lord Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit. Our spirits are joined with his punctiliarly. We're saved. Yeah, we don't always experience this. We'll talk about the progressive part of sanctification too, in, in a little bit. Um, and so as spiritual directors, we look at these folks and we say, why? Why isn't this person experiencing this relationship? Or Hallelujah, the person is. What do I know about the care of souls? I know that the Holy Spirit is ever present in the hearts of the believers, that he's ever working to conform the believer to the image of the Lord Jesus, and to transform them.

And this is true, even if we don't feel it. But even in the dark when we can't distinguish his presence, we trust that he's here, he's near to us, and he's forming us into the likeness of the Lord Jesus, his dear son.

Therefore, what we bring to the soul care relationship as spiritual directors isn't the care itself. Now we'll say to our students, the Holy Spirit is the spiritual director. He's the one that brings the care. But what we bring is the expectation of his nurture, and the assistant, insistence upon his presence and his action. A really simple thesis statement here. Soul care, or spiritual direction as defined at the institute here, involves the practice of biblically-based discernment by both the director and the directee, in order that the directee will be further formed in faith in Christ Jesus and sanctified. Spiritual direction focuses upon intently looking at the directee's personal prayer life, the heart of their relationship with the God. Um, we look at their relationship with the word of God, we look at their relationship with the Holy Spirit, and their response. And then the consequent living out of that life in the community of believers in the world. And at the Institute for Spiritual Formation, that's the ISF. The training of the directors involves attention to at least three major areas relating to God and truth, relating to God and relationships with ourselves, with him, with others, and relating to beauty. And this is kind of an outline of where we're going tonight. Let me, we're going to talk about soul care a little bit more, and then we're going to talk about discernment, and then we're gonna talk about faith, and kind of unpack those a little bit, both spiritually and psychologically. And then we're going to, if we have time, visit these three formative areas: truth, relationship, and beauty, and talk about how those are helpful, in forming folks who work in soul care, and spiritual directors. So that's kind of a road map of where we're going.

Okay. A little more about soul care. Actually, first, I want to talk about discipleship. We didn't get to hear Mike Wilkins, um, but if you had, he would tell you, I think I'm on fairly firm ground here, he would tell you that true discipleship is spiritual formation and is soul care. Um, and he'd be right. That's, that's correct. I'm reading through Mike's Zondervan commentary on the book of Matthew right now. And I've just finished the section on the Sermon on the Mount, and I'm like, boy, he's right. This is what discipleship is, and it is exactly what spiritual formation is. But traditionally, when we speak of it in evangelical circles, we aren't talking about exactly the same thing. Discipleship and spiritual direction aren't, aren't an exact match, and I, and I wanted to clarify that first. When we talk about discipleship, we're usually talking about early training of believers in things that are spoken of in Hebrews five eleven to six one or two. The, the elementary things that the writer of Hebrews gives us, um, learn to feed themselves from the word, confess and repent of their sins, prepare for and participate in communion, be filled with the Holy Spirit to be baptized, and to begin to grow in holiness. Those elementary things. Those are pretty much the things discipleship looks at. Discipleship is different in other ways as well. Um, discipleship tends to focus on learning. Uh, I don't know how many of you guys, I've done both of these, you know, gone through Campus Crusades' transferable concept, go through the Navigators', you know, training program. Those are learning models of discipleship.

In spiritual direction, we focus more on becoming than, than the doing or learning of things. Spiritual direction focuses on the internal maturation of our souls rather than the external actions and evidences of that internal maturation. Um, spiritual direction is non-programmatic. Spiritual formation is non-programmatic in its approach. We don't get 'twelve weeks to formation'. No,

that's not, that's not the way we come at it. We focus on one's relationship, ongoing and deepening faith relationship with the Lord Jesus, and we focus on this individual's relationship with the Lord Jesus. We're not going to, get, so we're gonna be very concrete. What's happening right now in this person? It's not more abstract, new believers, prayer practices kind of thing. Um, spiritual direction also, so it's not the traditional evangelical discipleship. It's, it goes past that. Actually, what it's more like in some ways are, um, the stages, if you're familiar with, this is a whole nother lecture. But if you're familiar with the Orthodox and Catholic, um, the older church traditions of the threefold way of purgation and illumination and union with Christ. Spiritual direction probably marches a little more along with that, whereas discipleship would do purgation and maybe a little into illumination, in the traditional evangelical sense. Okay. Spiritual direction also differs from pastoral counseling and therapy. Um, at times it has elements of these, but spiritual direction doesn't focus on a particular problem, or a particular relationship as pastoral counseling tends to.

Um, David Benner, who you guys all get the privilege of hearing next week, and from whom I've learned so much, talks about the fact that pastoral counseling is more concerned with cure, where spiritual direction is more concerned with care. Spiritual direction doesn't address the psychological needs of people with debilitating mental illnesses; it may address the spiritual needs of folks with mental illnesses, but, um, not the psychological needs. And unlike psychotherapy, and this is a biggie, the relationship in focus is not the relationship between the directee and the director, or between the directee and other people in his or her world. Rather, the relationship in focus is between the directee and God. And, and that makes some difference, because unlike therapy and counseling, training and spiritual direction, while it does involve

learning to recognize and work with stuff like resistance, transference, and counter-transference, and I'll explain those in a minute, it, you, we recognize them for the purpose of dispelling them and avoiding them, not for the purpose of ripening them and using them. Let me give you the quick and dirty, um, I just used some technical terms for therapists. Resistance refers to conscious obstacles that a client will bring to or throw in the path of therapy, for example, like, um, resisting therapy, resisting talking about things that are uncomfortable, by coming late by canceling sessions, by deliberately lying to their therapist, by just avoiding talking about something. Okay, that would be resistance.

Transference, on the other hand, refers to the unconscious assumptions or personal beliefs that a person brings to therapy and projects onto their therapist, sure, that there are truths that reside within this relationship. And counter-transference is the stuff, the unconscious stuff that hopefully becomes conscious in the therapist that gets projected back or is in the relationship between the therapist and the client. Now, obviously those things hinder the therapy relationship, um, but they're very useful as well because as they're allowed to grow and they become grist for the therapy mill, and can be checked, reality-tested, and then the person can begin to make volitional choices about the unconscious stuff in their hearts, part of the process of therapy. Um, that makes sense? Do you need examples for that? Yeah, you guys with me? Okay, thanks. So in therapy, we, we purposely invite and work with those things. In countertran--um, in spiritual direction, we purposely work at recognizing, avoiding, and dispelling those kinds of things because the relationship isn't between us and the person, it's between the person and God. And that's what we're really looking at. And so, that, there's a, there's a tone differentiation here between counseling and spiritual direction. However, there is psychology involved in soul care,

as you might expect. I mean, it's about humans, so there's gonna be psychological things that are true here.

Three main pieces of things that are true about the psychology of humans that really affect spiritual direction have to do with the fact that we are created beings, and that we're created beings, and, three things, we're made in the image of God, and therefore one of the things that that means is that we're made for intimate relationship with our creator. And this mirrors the relationship, the, the intimate relationship that the Trinity has together, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The second thing is that we're made for something, specifically. Certain actions, certain functions, and, and then the third thing that that I want to look at is that the normal expectations for our spiritual growth is developmental. Okay, three main things that are true about us human beings. Um, the relationship, that we're made for relationship and made for intimate relationship. In this, we mirror the Trinity. We've already talked about First Corinthians six seventeen and the John fourteen passage and our, our union with Christ in spirit. Then there's the whole fact relationally that he, he calls himself our Abba, our daddy. For us believers we have this intimate relationship with God, and that leaves us as fellow siblings with the Lord Jesus. He talks about that a lot, um, in Matthew, he uh, He, our resurrected Lord says to the women, Matthew twenty-eight, go and tell my brothers. That's his reference for them. Uh, Romans eight twenty-nine. Wonderful. For God, for those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his son, that he might be the first born among many brothers.

Stop here a minute. The likeness of his son so that he is the firstborn among many brothers. That means when folks look at us, they should go, "You remind me of somebody. Oh, it's your big

brother, Jesus. You remind me of your big brother, Jesus." And that's true about us, and that has psychological ramifications for us. That spiritual truth. Um, John fifteen also says that another intimate relationship we have with the Lord is that of friends. He tells his disciples, I've called you friends because I've told you everything that the father has told me. So this is part of who we are to him. And we're his beloved. His beloved children; Psalm 103 tells us about how God fathers us; he, he knows our frame, he remembers we're dust, he has compassion on us, he heals our diseases, forgives our sins. You know, we're. Well, I should, I'll own this. I'm often surprised by my sin. I can't believe I did that, you know? God's not surprised by my sin, he knows I'm dust. You know, he looks at me and goes, hm, dusty day today, huh? You know. So we're made in the image of God we're made, and that partially means that we're made for intimate relationship like the Trinity has. And also then we're made for something. And there's tons of verses in the New Testament about this. For example, what I'm talking about here is Ephesians two ten, for we're his workmanship made for good works. He's prepared them for us. Specific things for us to do. And it's a, it's a *poiema* is the word, workmanship, craftsmanship. We're made for holiness.

Um, First Corinthians six. Don't you know your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? Therefore, you're bought with the price, so honor God in your body. We're made for something. And then finally, it means we're made, uh, to grow developmentally over time. This is God's plan in creation. I mean, I think we see it mirrored way back in Genesis when he takes six days of creation to make the world. You know, his plan for this creation has always been development over time. Same thing with us. Development over time. Sanctification is punctiliar. It happens in a moment. We're transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, [snaps fingers] like that. Ephesians two eight, for by grace you have been saved through faith. No, past

action completed action, 'have been saved.' But then there's also verses like First Corinthians one eighteen, that says for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those of us who are being saved. So there's that progressive notion, the developmental notion of sanctification. Present progressive Teds are being saved. So it's not a change model when we're working in soul care, it's a growth model. We're not trying to fix people or change actions, trying to grow them and help them grow and see how God is growing them. The theology, uh, the theological realities about us, besides these realities, there are theological realities about us that, um, stand in the way of the formation of our souls.

For example, there's a problem with our hidden unknown heart, hence the invitation in psalm one thirty-nine, twenty-three and twenty-four, search me oh Lord, know, my heart, try me. See if there's hurtful ways in me, wicked ways. Lead me in the everlasting way. Um, First Corinthians four four. I've pondered this one a lot. Paul says, my conscience is clear, but that doesn't make me innocent. My conscience is clear. But that doesn't make me innocent. It's the Lord who judges me. Therefore, he goes on, judge nothing before the appointed time. Wait till the Lord comes, and he'll bring to light the motives of men's hearts. And then each will receive his reward from the Lord. Okay. So a problem with our hidden heart stands in the way of formation, our own wayward actions and desires. Just plain old sin, you know, we know we're all sinners, and that stands in the way of our formation into the image of Christ, into the likeness of Christ.

There's a mismatch between our ultimate union with God and heaven, and the reality of us living here on earth. The whole creation is in bondage, we're told. This mismatch means that whoever I'm going to be, it hasn't happened yet. Um, First John three two. Now we see through a glass

darkly. Uh, that's First Corinthians thirteen. Um, First John three two is, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

I think it's going to be, we'll see him, the Lord will say, look at me, and we'll look at him. And in his eyes we'll see our true selves mirrored and we'll go, well that's who I am. And we'll see him, and we'll go, that's who you are. But we don't have that reality. We don't have that knowledge right now that is real to us. And so the disparity between who we think we are and what we know and who we are in his eyes and who we're gonna be, that is, is a problem for us in formation now. It stands in the way of it. And the, and the other piece of it, another piece of it here is just damage from living in this fallen world and from other peoples' sin. And those kinds of things can stand in the way of our experience of our union with the Lord Jesus, and our growth. Um, that's where the Romans passage comes in. Romans eight eighteen to twenty seven, the whole creation is bound over to decay now and waits breathlessly to see the Sons of God revealed. And then there's passages like, you know, First Peter four sixteen and on that tells us how to live life and suffer as a Christian because of the fallenness of the world and damage other people. There's also accusations and confusions from the enemy of our soul that stand in the way of our formation. The devil lies to us. He's our adversary, and he's active about this. And those things also stand in the way of my experience of my life as a child of God, and my growth as a child of God. And then there's just plain old youngness that stands in the way. We're talking about immaturity here that impacts our ability with the Lord, that impacts our ability to discern his presence.

Um, that keeps us from knowing who he is and what he's doing. Um, Stephen and I just had our first grandchild this summer and she's about ten, little over ten weeks now. And she's at that stage where you get these gummy smiles, you know, and the bobbly head, but she can't quite hold her gaze on you so she'll see me and smile and then her head'll slip and it's gone and I'm out of her world, and, and she doesn't know who I am yet. Well, I'm looking forward to the day when she looks at me and says, oh, that's my grandma. And we can talk. Immaturity keeps us from recognizing the ones who love us, humanly speaking. Spiritual immaturity keeps us from recognizing the one who loves us. Okay. To sum it up, we're born in original sin without the Holy Spirit indwelling us. And when we become Christians, we do not naturally or habitually know yet how to be filled with the Holy Spirit's command. Filled, refilled, refilled. We don't know how to abide in the vine. We don't know how to stimulate one another to love and good works. And we have to be taught these things, because we don't know how to experience that internal relationship. We have, as Don Coe would say, been habituated in autonomy. And so we have previously learned to be selfish sinners go going our own way. Having Christ formed in us involves a struggle, and a process. Within spiritual direction, we expect to see a gradual process of discernment based upon talking and listening prayer, and we expect to see somebody grow in faith over time.

We by nature are mastered by something. That's true about us humans. We're mastered by ideas, relationships, desires, addictions, fears, values. So spiritual direction is often a journey of explorations, kind of, spelunking into the depths of our heart and looking for, what masters me. And then in light of that loving relationship, being able to attach our own volition to the truth, and then to decide how we are going to respond to the Lord Jesus. It's not, in, in spiritual

direction, we don't just want to know him better. We want to be known by him. We don't just want to master the word of God, we want to be mastered by the word of God. So our goal is growth in knowing ourselves, in knowing God, and in causing the gap between those to get narrower and narrower. As we mature, there's less of a distance between my character and between the character of the Lord Jesus. That's what it means to mature in Christ. His life in me as a believer will be expressed more and more by my life. Paul says, for me, for me to live is Christ. And that's what he's talking about, the formation. Paul is becoming like Jesus. Um, he is our life, he said. Okay, when I'm working with somebody in spiritual direction, I'm listening for, um, what goes on in their souls and when I think about their souls, just, this is my conceptualization, I think about three functional levels of their soul.

I think about their conscious prayer life, techniques and various relationships, intercessory prayer, and Bible study. And then I think about a second layer. And it's all those things I listed before that hinder our formation. A second layer that needs work, um, the person's false self, their personal history, their temperaments, their desires, their habits, their griefs, their sins, all the stuff that clutters our hearts that we don't want to look at. And this layer is important to attend to. It's critical to attend to, because that's what blocks our experience of the third layer of the person, which is the fiery core of our being, where our spirit and the Holy Spirit are one. Three layers. A lot of times, my experience of evangelical circles has been we want to jump from number one to number three. You know, prayer techniques, um things of which you're conscious, and then the fact that you are united with the Holy Spirit. And we kind of want to skip layer two. Um, but layer two is crucial for us to attend to. Um, I was trying to think of a good example of this I was, and I was reading in Romans two. So I'm going to give you one from just where I was reading

when I was putting this together. Romans two four says to us that it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance. It's his kindness that leads us to repentance. So repentance is more than just a glib 'I'm sorry,' you know, a turning, a done deal. Repentance is a personal response to God's kindness.

It's relational, so it's going to involve things like godly sorrow over having hurt my lover, for having disappointed him, having not been like him. Um, and so we, we, we grieve our condition as we turn from it. We, we grow out of it as well as say 'that's wrong, I'm sorry, I'm turning.' So in, in, as spiritual directors then, we work on, in that level two, as well as in level one and level three of folks' soul. And our hope and expectation is, as the person attends to the presence of God and their response to him, they will begin to lay aside those weights that so easily entangle them and keep them from doing all those good things and running the race, um, that the author in Hebrews is talking about. Okay. Definition then of spiritual direction. This is from a book called The Practice of Spiritual Direction, um, by two guys, William Barry and William Connolly. It's a, it's a small book, relatively short and packed. It's pretty profound. And they say we define spiritual, uh, Christian spiritual direction then, as the help given by one Christian to another, helping them attend to God's personal communication. The focus is on experience, not just ideas, and specifically religious experience. One's experience, one's spiritual experience, and not as just a one time event, 'I had a spiritual experience once when I was on drugs,' you'll hear people say, 'let me tell you about this.' When people say, what do you do? And I say, you know, I'll tell them eventually I'm a professor of, 'What do you teach?' Well, I my subject matter is psychology and spirituality. I said, I was talking to a gal this summer in a, in a store. She said "oh, I had a

spiritual experience once!" She said uh, I was smoking pot, and I heard a statue of Mary talk to me. Yeah, okay. In spiritual direction,

[audience laughs]

we don't just do the one time isolated event. We do ongoing relational events, ongoing personal relational events. So we're always looking at this person and union with God. And it's not that we aren't interested in the other things in people's lives, and, specifically because though, because God is present in those other things. And so if the person comes in worried about something or someone or comes in angry or comes in tired, that's a spiritual event. God is present in that with the person. And we may, I may say to them, can you sit with God and talk to him about that; can you sit with God in that experience? The focus of interest, though, is the prayer experience of the directee. Spiritual tells us that we're not just looking at external actions or trying to teach the somewhat people to do a particular thing, but we're looking at, at the heart. It's a matter of the heart. And it also reminds us that it's, another spirit is involved, it's the Holy Spirit that's the director. And direction isn't, "let me tell you what to do," at least not in our model and not in our evangelical model. But it's saying, "you are on a journey. You're going somewhere. Let's talk about that." And it's Christian. There are all kinds of spiritual direction, uh, materials out there that have nothing to do with the Lord Jesus. So sometimes people will talk about spiritual direction. You may want to ask them, are you talking about Christian spiritual direction or Buddhist spiritual direction? Historically, there's a long tradition of this kind of relationship in the church, starting with folks in the Bible.

Um, much of the epistles are, are Paul doing spiritual direction in his writing, you know, um, on up through the early church years, um, Hippolytus wrote about spiritual direction in the early church, Augustine did, the Desert Fathers did, um, various religious orders on up through the teaching of Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley. John Wesley spiritual direction groups are actually the model that we use here at the Institute for Spiritual Formation. Um, in all these sacred relationships, we find the committed relationship for the purpose of the growth of this one person. Well, let me give you four quickies. What makes an evangelical soul pure? Because there's a lot of other Christian soul care, spiritual direction out there that isn't evangelical. You know, this has been a tradition that the Catholic Church, the liturgical churches have never lost. They've always had it. So there's a lot of other kinds of Christian spiritual direction. What makes it evangelical? Number one, a focus on the word. We're people of the book. The Bible tells us about the Lord Jesus who exegetes the Father for us, and the focus of our meditation, and the focus of our prayer practices center around scripture. Um, we expect and believe that God's given us everything pertaining to life and godliness. Secondly, it's evangelical because we have an insistence on the Holy Spirit's own present and work in the life of the believer. We believe in the priesthood of the believer that this is an unmediated relationship, that there is a direct relationship between me and the Lord Jesus.

Um, what are the accusations that was leveled, um, during the Spanish Inquisition and really promoted the anger of the Catholic Church towards the Protestants was that the Protestants, those Protestants, encouraged people to read the Bible and pray on their own outside of the church and without the church's intervention. And this created a real problem for the Spanish Catholic mystics, who also spent a lot of time meditating on scripture and praying on their own. And they

were accused of being Protestants because they were suspect, because they were praying on their own alone. So you see this, this has been a part of the Protestant tradition, you know, from the beginning, from way back. Um, focus on the word, an insistence on the Holy Spirit's own presence with us, the priesthood of the believers; as evangelicals then, we expect that the fruit of this is going to be holiness. And sanctification will resort, will result in transformed lives. We aren't just in it for how pleasant it is to sit and pray. We aren't just as in it for the gratification of, you know, the love between me and Jesus. We expect to grow more and more like him, and that means we will do and be something, someone. And then fourthly, as evangelicals, we value dual knowledge, knowing God, knowing ourselves. And we expect to see God show up in everything. We expect to find him everywhere in our lives. There isn't a part of our lives that is non-spiritual. We don't compartmentalize like that.

We believe that all true creation knowledge is gonna increase our knowledge of what God is doing because he is the maker and sustainer of all, and therefore we seek out the truth that he's doing. This allows us also to find his handiwork in the arts and sciences. Um, when I, I taught psychology undergrad for a while, and I found this verse in Proverbs, Proverbs twenty-five two says, It's the glory of God to conceal a matter, and to seek out a matter is the glory of kings. And I thought that's what the social sciences do. When we're right on in the social sciences, we're looking for the things that God has concealed in his creation, and we seek them out. Okay, the process of spiritual discernment now, of spiritual formation now, a spiritual, uh, of, of the relationship and spiritual direction, is discernment leading to growth and faith. Those are the next two things I want to talk about, then we'll take a break right at fifteen. In a very real sense, the program at the Institute for Spiritual Formation is all about discernment, um, John Coe says,

discernment is the laser beam that shoots through the whole program. It is its core. And what he's talking about when he says that and the reason our program is, is really unique and good, is that the soul care practicum sequence that we have our students do takes the academic learning from the classroom, and believe me, there's quite a bit of rigour that goes on in our classrooms. And the experiential prayer projects that we have our students do that are also a part of every class they take.

We've committed ourselves as professors to the three plus one rule. So we're going to have three parts academic, this is minimal rule, we're going to have at least three parts academic and one part experiential in every one of our classes. So our students are learning, but they're also becoming. And so we take the academic stuff, the experiential soul work, and then we have them apply it in relationship as they learn to be spiritual directors with other folks. We take the truth, we take their personal growth. We combine these two into extended relational work with self and others. So within the practicum sequence, what we're asking our students to do is to discern the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of others, either the individual with whom they're sitting or the spiritual direction group with whom they're working, and therefore to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit in a practical way, right now, within this relationship. And we challenge our students not to wait to be spiritual, you know, ten years from now, forty years from now, when I'm spiritual, then maybe I can minister, but rather to be present today to the presence of the Lord. This is direct and concrete. This is what growth and spirituality are truly. And we don't have to so much muster up spiritual greatness through, uh, our own effort, or wait till we're spiritual giants, but rather be open to the fact that God is here. He is present, he is working. He's doing something right now in this person.

One of the ways I train my soul care students in, um, in discernment ,and I encourage you to try this at home, um, is to have them, when Judy and I teach this sequence, the first sequence we teach about eight, in about eight days during interterm, we just pack it in. So we have the students for at least ten segments of four to five hours a piece, and at the end of the segments we'll pair them off in twos, and we'll say, we want you to sit facing this person with a notebook on your lap. We want you pray for them for fifteen, twenty minutes in dead silence. And as you pray for them, we want you to listen. Listen, on behalf of this person to what the Holy Spirit is inviting you to pray, and put down how you're led to pray for this person. Put down pictures that come to your mind. Put down words that come put down what the Lord encourages you to ask for this person. Write it down in their notebook, but don't tell them. And then at the end of the time, after you've prayed, we also want you to write down for what you needed prayer today, because the other person's sitting there praying for you. And then don't talk to each other about it. And we, and we try to pair 'em up with folks they don't know real well. Well, it's a little hard because we're a pretty tight community. So we make them go the whole eight days without talking to each other about this. But they have to pray for each other, sometimes twice a day, you know, twenty minutes. Okay, then at the end, we get them together and we say, okay now compare notes.

What, for what were you praying, and what did you say you needed prayer that day? For what were you pray, we want them to practice listening. We want 'em to practice listening in prayer. It's really cool to see the things they come up with, um, and, and to see how the Lord leads his people and speaks to them, in caring for and praying for each other. That's just one of our

discernment training, um, exercises. Um, there is obviously a growth curve involved here. We minister differently as we mature because as we mature, we grow in our ability to recognize God and to know his work. And we also grow in our ability to recognize what's not of God, if it's our own selfishness, our own brokenness, um, something the devil's trying to do in the person's life, evil of various sorts. This is a crucial ability for us humans. It's what, um, Adam and Eve, it's how they blew it in the, in the garden, because they didn't recognize the voice of a convincing tempter, versus the voice of what God told them. And they made the wrong choice. But we teach our students to begin where they find themselves and to practice the presence of God, as Brother Lawrence puts it. Now, the temptation when we try to do this, when we start this work, the temptation is just kind of put on spirituality, you know, to be like what we think a spiritual director ought to be like, rather than just open to the work of the Holy Spirit. And this opening requires us to penetrate deeply into our own needs, into the muck and the junk of our own hearts, our own desires, our own fears, and then to say, OK, where is Christ in all of this, I know he's here. Where is he?

If we don't do this, get in touch with our own stuff and know it and open our hearts to the Lord first, then, spiritual direction just becomes another kind of false self-posturing and hiding. But in soul care, we center on the fact that right now Jesus is present and the Holy Spirit's doing something deeper than just ourselves and our character. And we look to God and we say, What are you doing? And we try to discern that. Wisdom, as Proverbs eight tells us, is the understanding of created things. And it's the task and privilege of us humans to grow in wisdom, to delight in God's presence, in his creation, and recognize and hate, evil, and love, good and understand it more. Hebrews five is, is a key verse here. Um, the writer of Hebrews says,

Hebrews five fourteen, that solid food is for the mature. And here's how he defines mature: who have by constant use trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Maturity is being trained in distinguishing good from evil. Knowing the difference. So the mature can distinguish this, can tell good from evil. In the same passage later of, it continues on into the beginning of Hebrews six, we're assured that the mature people are also people of faith who live in a holy manner. Discernment is the organizing principle for spiritual direction, but it should also be central for all of our lives. For all of us followers of the Lord Jesus, our continual query is, What's the Lord Jesus doing right now? What's he doing in me? How am I responding to him? To what is he inviting me? For what is he made me? Where's he going? Where's he working? How can I cooperate with him? How can I follow him?

Participate in his kingdom and his rule and reign? We are followers of the Lord Jesus. He is working. He is moving. How do we follow? Um, that God works and speaks to his people, uh, it is, his will can be discerned, is clear from scripture, I just want to read, there's so many verses here and I, I have a lot of favorites. I just want to read you a few of them. Um, he who is of God hears God's word. Now we've received the spirit who is from God that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me. But the counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, and will remind you of everything I've said to you. For the Lord tests a perverse man, but he takes the upright into his confidence, like the pure in heart shall see God. God takes the upright into his confidence. And then one of my favorite, Proverbs four eighteen and nineteen says, the path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter to the full light of day. But the wicked are in deep darkness, and they do not know what makes

them stumble. I grew up in Chicago and didn't have a chance to see the dawn. I mean, you know, by the time I got up, it was, you know, the buildings hit it anyway. But when I was a church camp, counselor, um, I guess I would have been a freshman at Moody, uh, my first time sleeping out was with a group of little girls that I was supposed to take care of, and I forgot my flashlight.

And we were just sleeping in a cow pasture across from the camp, I mean, it was no big deal, but I was petrified because the cows kept bumping in the night. And I remember lying there and seeing how black the night sky was, and I literally had never seen it before. And then after while it was grey, and then after a while I could tell which, where east was, because there was a little sliver of light. And I began to look around and I could begin to tell. There's a tree. There's a fence. Oh, good. The cows are all on the other side of the fence. I was pretty sure they were, but I was scared, you know, and then we could see, oh, there's rocks. Now I can get up and go to the outhouse without falling on my face. Because there was light shining on my path, and I could see what made me stumble. Okay, that's the picture in Proverbs four, that those who are righteous are going to know ever more and more what makes them stumble. So there's lots in scripture about how God reveals himself to us, talks to us, instructs us. Um, one of the things that can be discerned, uh, is the discernment of spirits that, uh, is talked about in First Corinthians twelve. I think there's at least three things that can be discerned here. The work of a human spirit, the work of a demonic spirit, or the work of the Holy Spirit. Um, I'm indebted to, uh, Charles Talbert in a book called Reading Luke, which is one of my favorite commentaries on Luke, where he gives an example of all three of these.

He gives the example of three spiritual explanations for one physical phenomena. And it would require discernment to know which is which. For example, in Luke one twenty, Zachariah couldn't speak, he was mute because of the action of God. Because of the action of the Holy Spirit, remember, because of his disbelief when he was told about the birth of John. And so he was mute. And that was God's doing. Um, Luke eleven fourteen tells us about muteness that is due to demonic activity. Uh, Mark seven fifty-two indicates that there is some other, um, cause, either, um, natural cause or illness or muteness in an individual. So there's three causes of what looks like the same physical phenomena, and to know the difference in those cases would require discernment, discernment of spirits in this case. Three things, humans, evil spirits, the Holy Spirit. Work of the Holy Spirit. So spiritual direction then includes the ministry of discernment. We look at the person with whom we saying and we are asking ourselves, what's the cause of this person's state? What's going on? What's the movement here? Is it the person's human spirit? And if so, what part? Is it the work of the Holy Spirit? Is it the work of the evil one? And we ask, what's God doing? And how is this person responding? Now, also here is there's a notion, and we talk to our students about this, that if we're regarding sin in our lives, if we're holding on to it, it's habitual for us. This clutters, this clouds our vision and we cannot see, we cannot discern.

Clear sight comes after purgation, after repentance and cleansing. it's the pure in heart that are going to see God. And uh, Jesus says, my friends know me and they obey. So we also talk about that when we're talking about discernment. There's another thing and I'm not going to linger here tonight, but there are dark nights of the soul in which we feel like we're in the dark and can't see and cannot discern. And that's not necessarily, um, because we're far from God, but because he, um, is working with us in another way. John of the Cross would say he's withdrawn himself from

us for the purpose of growth. And one of the things that helps me think about this is um, and you guys know the book, Annie Dillard wrote *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. She's a naturalist and she wrote this book. And she talks about realizing that you can be blinded by the dark, physical darkness, or you can be blinded by incredibly bright light. And I think spiritually, there's an analogy there that we can be blinded by the darkness of our own sin or brokenness or trauma, or we can be blinded by the brightness as we're facing into his presence. Um, it's another lecture to talk about the dark night of the soul. If you're interested in, I encourage you to, um, uh, read Teresa of Avila *Interior Mansions*, uh, Saint John of the Cross wrote about this extensively. Uh, Bernard, uh, Groeschel, in *Spiritual Passages*, is a modern day book about this. Bernard Benedict maybe his name is.

Um, there are things in our own souls that can block our ability to discern when we are training our students, we ask them to, um, prepare in some of these ways to, to study their own internal relational history and its effect on them, um, their own strengths and weaknesses, their own sense of calling, for what are they made, how are they gifted, um, cultural concern, you know, our, our sense of self is laid down in a cultural matrix, and um, that affects the, the options that we can see. Going along with discernment then, we um, growing in our ability to discern is based on faith. And I want to talk a little bit about some of the psychological and spiritual underpinnings of faith. Psychologically speaking, to have faith in God is to have two things at least: secure attachment to God, and object constancy with God. And these two things are part of our natural human development, and they mean that we can say this to God. I know that you exist, and I know what kinds of things you do with me. I know that you are dependable. I know your character, and I know who I am. And I'm confident of the relationship between you and me, even

if I'm not experiencing it at this moment. I can remember you, and I can remember us, even when we don't seem to be together. Now that's a psychological way of saying what the writers of, writer of Hebrews says, you know, faith is seeing the unseen, is having trust in the invisible things.

This involves a deep knowing, an assurance that Gods regard in his presence are steadfast, even in times when we aren't experiencing either of them, and our connection with God then is maintained in times of trial, in times of testing. Mature faith says, no, I know he knows me, even when I don't feel like I know him. And faith means that to put it, uh, in a greeting card kind of way, we don't doubt in the darkness what we saw in the light. We hold on to the assurance that we had. Faith is a sure knowledge of who I am, who God is, and the relationship between the two of us. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and being certain of what we do not see. This is a heavy truth and one towards which we have to grow. We don't just say, Oh, it's true. I know. There we are. Many, most of us go through this questioning and growing towards this. Um, and this, too, is part of what we address in spiritual direction. How are you growing in faith? Faith isn't coercing God into action, believing that he's going to do our bidding. Um, faith is cooperation with God in action. It's our personal response to his personal initiative. Um, we relate to God with the same psychological mechanisms with which we relate to everybody else. And so to the extent I'm broken or sinful or immature, and I'm relating to the people around me that way, that's who I am to God as well. And so my faith is hindered by that.

Now the really good news is that God is a real person who lives in the heart of the believer, no matter how broken or how sinful in the moment, or how immature or how poor their family life

was. The Holy Spirit is a real person expressing himself inside to our spirit. And that's where the growth is. That's where we have hope. You know, that doesn't even require therapy because he's a real person and he's really relating to us. Now, obviously, I'm not anti-therapy. I'm a licensed psychologist and like, do therapy. But the relationship with the Holy Spirit is different than the interjects, the internal relationships we have with our parents and other people were significant to us. It's a continually renewed experience of unity, because the Holy Spirit is alive and present in us. Um, when I was in high school, my parents were going to a church where a pastor would get overwhelmed by stuff like this and he would just stop and he'd throw his hands up and go, "Glory!" And I, I think about this, the Holy Spirit constantly living in us, renewing our experience of him, not dependent on our psychological brokenness. And for me, it's a glory moment. Well, thank God he's here. Um, but we don't continually experience that reality, and, um, he spiritual direction and soul care disciplines that work on growing and deeper holiness and believing in his presence and developing faith even when we don't, um, feel him here.

How do we train folks to become spiritual directors? We train them in three areas. Knowing God in truth, this includes constant interaction with scripture by study and prayer, meditation, seeking God's truth in his handiwork, knowing the truth about that. We look at knowing God and relationships. We have communion with God, with ourselves and with others. Um, these are healing, truth telling, relationships that address the wounds that are in our hidden heart or the youngness that are in our hidden hearts and our sins. And then within these relationships, we experience mercy, and we learn to receive and give grace and love. And we ask what's going on in me before God, what's going on in this person, before God? And then we also work on knowing God in beauty and in silence. And this involves investing time in creation and in sub-

creation, things other people have made or created. And notice, these three things only are formative for our souls and for those of us who are spiritual directors in that when they are related to God in truth, relationship, beauty, we can falsely relate to all of these things as well. We can falsely relate to scripture and not relate to scripture and God. I mean, the devil did that. He used scripture and he was falsely relating to it. He wasn't relating to it in right relationship with the Lord. Um, compare what the devil did, quoting, you know, scripture, and misquoting it during the temptation of Jesus.

And, and compare that then to the power of, to the, Paul's confession, where he talks about, His power is made perfect in my weakness. So even in weakness, when Paul was rightly relating to God and to truth, he was able to fulfill God's will, and be, minister powerfully. Um, I think I'm gonna stop here. Let's take a break. When we come back, we're going to talk about, um, these, unpack these three areas a little bit more, of, uh, the formative parts of truth and relationship and beauty. And then we'll have some questions. Thanks.