

Spiritual Friendships

Faithful friends are a sure shelter: whoever finds one has found a treasure.

Faithful friends are beyond price; no amount can balance their worth.

Faithful friends are life-saving medicine. —Sirach 6:14–16

Many men long for deeper relationships. One practice to consider for this is having a spiritual friend—that is, a companion to walk with you along your spiritual journey. In a spiritual friendship, you offer each other mutual encouragement, support, and direction. And together, you pay attention to God's presence and leading in your lives.

This kind of friendship involves an intentional practice of meeting on a regular basis—say, over lunch or coffee monthly or every other week. You discuss concerns and joys of your life, talk about your aspirations and questions, and perhaps pray for each other.

To find such a friend, think of someone who can be a companion with you on your spiritual journey. Who are you drawn to? Who do you connect with? Who gets you? This may or may not be someone who shares your particular faith. Some people benefit from having a spiritual friend from another faith tradition and find that this is mutually enriching. After thinking

of someone, discuss your interest with that person to see if you might be drawn to each other. If so, explore this practice together for a period and see what happens.

To get started, establish common understandings about what you are seeking, how often you will meet, when and where you will meet, confidentiality, and at what point you will review your practice. In your next meeting, you could share your spiritual journeys and explore some of the themes and questions that emerge for you.

When you meet, you might begin and end by pausing in silence or offering a prayer. Take turns sharing and listening together. Speak from the heart and listen from the heart. To create a safe space for deep sharing, uphold confidentiality and honor the sacred trust between you. Be vulnerable in sharing personal experiences, and allow this to draw you closer. Listen with empathy and without judgment as a way of showing respect.

Subjects to consider include your . . .

- > spiritual pilgrimage,
- > experience of God,
- > images of God,
- > spiritual practices,
- > relationships with others,
- > areas for spiritual growth,
- > questions about faith and life.

You might consider using the Bible or another book, but be careful that this doesn't distract from sharing your lived experience. It's easy to talk about "it"—a book, ideas, etc.—and not share about you.

For Discussion:

- For what are you grateful? How might God be in this?
- Where are signs of God's presence in your life?
- How have you received or extended love recently, and what was this like?
- What has been painful or troubling for you?
- What struggles are you experiencing? How does God seem near or far in this?
- What or who helped you become aware of God's presence?
- What may be blocking your awareness of God?
- What is stirring within you or getting your attention?
- What might God want you to know or do?
- What questions are you wondering about?

*Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds,
not neglecting to meet together . . . but encouraging one another.*

—Hebrews 10:24–25

Recommended resources for spiritual friends:

Dorothy Devers, *Faithful Friendship* (Forward Movement, 1986); Wendy Miller, *Learning to Listen: A Guide for Spiritual Friends* (Upper Room, 1993); and Barry Woodbridge, *A Guidebook for Spiritual Friends* (Upper Room, 1985).

—Steve Thomas