

# **Spiritual Friendship Handbook.**

This Handbook is intended to help people develop spiritual friendships in order to enhance spiritual growth.

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## What is Spiritual Friendship and who is it for?

God desires that those who place their faith in Christ grow in spiritual maturity. James 2:14-26 makes it clear that true faith naturally results in obedience to God. And 1 Peter 1:14-16 urges us “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”” This process is called sanctification.

Our sanctification is produced by the Holy Spirit, but we must cooperate with God in the process. Passages like Philippians 2:12-13 show this cooperation between God’s work and our efforts. “...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” We are called to work, but are also told that God works in us.

One way that we can cooperate with God in our sanctification is by interacting with other Christians. We need each other. God has designed it that growth in Godliness requires interaction with others. This interaction comes in many forms from listening to sermons to simple conversations over coffee. Scripture makes it clear that fellowship, accountability and friendship play an important role in our spiritual maturity.

Proverbs 27:17      As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

Hebrews 10:24      And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Galatians 6:1      Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

Although there are many ways in which other people can be used of God in our lives, some of the most beneficial are spiritual friendship and mentoring. Spiritual friendships and mentoring relationships are personal partnerships where two individuals meet together with the specific intent to help each other grow spiritually.

### Spiritual Friendships:

Spiritual friendships are intimate partnerships whereby people who display some spiritual maturity get together to encourage one another towards greater maturity in Christ. These relationships are characterized by a mutual willingness to be honest and vulnerable. Through love, trust, prayer, scripture, confession, accountability and listening, individuals help each other to defeat habits of sin, to foster attentiveness to God’s presence and to enhance one’s understanding and obedience to God’s word.

## Mentoring:

Although very similar to spiritual friendships, mentoring relationships are intimate partnerships between a spiritually mature mentor and a less mature individual who desires to grow in hi or her faith. Employing similar strategies and purposes as a spiritual friendship, mentoring relationships, focus primarily on the spiritual needs of the one being mentored.

Spiritual maturity it not equivalent to depth of knowledge, but is more associated with faith, love and obedience. Scriptures like Colossian 3:10, however, do teach that we are renewed spiritually through knowledge. As we know more about God, we become more like Christ. As such, people who have not been a Christian for very long would be better served by a mentoring relationship, or a spiritual friendship with a more mature believer. These relationships involve recognizing the ways of God, and although this is not impossible for the new believer, lack of faith experience and scriptural knowledge will be an impediment. On the other hand, any believer can read scripture, pray, confess and maintain accountability with another.

Therefore, spiritual friendship and mentoring is for any believer who desires to grow spiritually and help other grow spiritual. The next section outlines some of the character qualities that make for good friendships.

## Qualities of a Good Friend

In order to get the most out of a spiritual friendship, the following character qualities should be in evidence. These characteristics apply to both spiritual friendships and mentoring relationships.

**A Desire to Grow:** Spiritual friendships exist to facilitate spiritual growth. If one does not wish to grow in faith, do not waste your time and more importantly do not waste the time of someone else.

**Love:** As 1 Corinthians 13 makes abundantly clear, love must be the foundation for all we do. This includes a love for God and a love for your friend. Do not enter into a partnership out of mere duty.

**Trustworthiness:** Because friends share personal struggles and confess sins to each other, each person must be trusted to maintain confidentiality.

**Honesty:** Good friends are willing to shed masks and reveal their true selves to one another. If you maintain a false front, there will be no growth. God wants to transform the real you. You must be willing to be known.

**Listening:** Friends listen to each other before they offer advice. They seek first to understand.

**Slow to speak** Friends are not quick with advice. They realize the importance of listen first to their friend and then more importantly to God. Friends do not desire to control each other.

**Prayer:** Friends talk to God about their friends.

**Encouragement:** Friends seek the best in each other. They may offer criticism and rebuke, but the intent is never to tear down, but rather to build up.

**Humility:** Friends listen to the correction of friends, realizing that it is done in love. They are not easily offended.

**Availability:** Friends regularly make time for each other.

**Joy:** Friends like to be with each other.

**Spiritual Maturity:** Friends and especially mentors should display a measure of spiritual maturity in their behavior and relationships. Where guidance is given and received, it must come from the overflow of a person's relationship with God.

## Establishing the Relationship

Spiritual Friendships and Mentoring relationships will benefit greatly from clearly establishing the nature and scope of the relationship. By addressing expectations from the beginning, people can avoid all kinds of problems. Furthermore, laying a groundwork will help keep the relationship on target and avoid unproductive habits. When establishing a new friendship the following issues should be addressed from the start.

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Why are you meeting:     | What do you hope to see accomplished in this relationship?<br>What is each person's motivation? Why have you chosen to meet with this specific person?   |
| How often will you meet: | Will you meet every week, two weeks, every month....   |
| When will you meet:      | Will you meet at the same time every week, or do your schedules require that you meet at different times each week?  |
| Length of visits         | How much time will you spend at each particular meeting?   |
| Where will you meet:     | In a public place or in a private setting?   |
| How long will this last: | Is this an open ended relationship, or will it last for a set period of time?  |
| Family Support:          | Does your spouse support this relationship, or will there be resentments in spending this time away from family?   |
| Confidentiality:         | Do you agree to maintain confidentiality? What things can you talk about with others?  |
| Exclusivity:             | Is there freedom for one or both people to have a second spiritual friendship or does this spread a person to thin?  |
| Activities:              | What will you do together? How much time will be given to sharing, prayer, scripture etc.  |
| Balance:                 | How can each person be sure that they have time to share?<br>Will you set time limits? Will you alternate the focus each time, one week devoted to one person's need and the next week to the other's? |

- Assignments: Will there be work done outside the meetings. Eg. Scripture reading or the reading of another book. Do you have freedom to make suggestions for the other person.
- Disciplines: Will this relationship work alongside the development of particular spiritual disciplines?
- Topics: What will you talk about? How can you ensure balance? How can you avoid being sidetracked? What is a side track?
- Questions: Will a specific set of questions be used for accountability purposes?

It would also be helpful to periodically evaluate the relationship and agree to make changes to the format where necessary.

## **Activities for Friends**

There is a wide variety of things that can be done in the context of a spiritual friendship. There is also a danger in becoming absorbed with mere chit chat. The following ideas can serve as suggestions for how a friendship could be structured in order to enhance the process of developing spiritual maturity.

### **Telling your Story:**

Early in your time together, it would be helpful to spend time sharing your personal history. This will not only help you to pay attention to how God has worked in your life in the past, but it will also help your friend to know you and discern spiritual patterns in your life. Share about your childhood, family, how you met your spouse, and of course how you came to faith in Christ. It would be good to describe any significant spiritual experiences in your life and any special or tragic memories. The honest telling of your story can be profoundly healing and may lead to praise and/or prayer for forgiveness and healing.

Another way to do this is to describe the ten most significant events in your life of faith and explain why you think they are significant. Perhaps also describe the ten (or however many) most important people in your life and how they contributed positively and negatively to your life and faith.

Alternatively, divide your life into chapters and describe the character of each of these chapters.

When listening to another person's story, pray that the holy Spirit would give you insight into that person's life. Look for patterns and milestones that could be responded to in prayer or serve as foundation for future questions and accountability issues. Avoid over analyzing the other person's life.

The goals in telling your stories

- Enhance the depth of the friendship
- Identify how God has worked in your life and the life of your friend
- Identify things to pray about
- Identify patterns of response
- Identify issues for accountability

## **Noticing God Together**

Sometimes we are blind to the movements of God in our life and we need the insight of others to interpret the events of our lives. We might share the frustration about a coworker and our friend may see that as God giving us an opportunity to love sacrificially. We might be excited about the purchase of a new computer and our friend may notice this as crowding God out of our spare time.

As we talk about our life, we can gain personal clarity on our sinful patterns and come to notice God 's work in our lives. Moreover, the insight of our friend may help notice things that we did not.

Spiritual friendships are excellent places to talk about the variety of struggles, decisions, relationships, sins and successes of daily life. Take the time to talk about the significant events that occurred since you last met. Talk about important decisions you are facing. This can then lead to confession, prayer, and perhaps guidance.

Sometimes it is good to develop these conversations by asking questions like the following:

- In what areas do you need God's provision, comfort or guidance.
- Where have you noticed God lately?
- Where do you think that God was trying to get your attention but you failed to notice?
- What has God been teaching you lately?
- What has happened in your life, recently that has made a difference in your spiritual life?
- What issues are currently affecting your spiritual growth?

## **Accountability**

Each of us have specific areas of sin that we struggle with on a regular basis. Often this sin gains additional power in our desire to maintain secrecy. As we become willing to share our struggles, we can find freedom. Accountability means giving another person the freedom to ask you about your struggles and responding with honesty.

Accountability should then lead to confession. In fact accountability without confession can lead to the pitfall of camaraderie in sin (see section 5 below)

Sometimes it is helpful to use routine questions to assist the accountability process. (See section 6 on Diagnosing spiritual health) Depending on the particular struggles of an individual, there are specific questions that should be asked every time you meet, while other questions could be asked on a less frequent basis.

## **Confession**

Confession means acknowledging sin and seeking forgiveness. Confession is primarily directed towards God (1 John 1:9) and also to those we have offended (Mat 5:23-24) but there is also a benefit to confessing sins to God in the presence of a friend or mentor (James 5:16) This is closely related to the process of accountability and is the natural follow up to it. By confessing our sins to God in the presence of another trusted person, while not required can be a way of making your confession more serious and complete. The other person may see things that you miss and ask questions about things you would rather avoid.

A further blessing is that after confession, the other person can confirm your forgiveness in Christ by speaking forgiveness to you and quoting scriptures such as 1 John 1:9, Psalm 32:1-2 or Psalm 103:12

## **Prayer**

One obvious activity that can be practiced in friendships and mentoring situations is prayer. Praying for each other in all aspects of life and faith. Prayer recognizes that the source of spiritual health and growth is not found in the abilities of the other person, but from the Holy Spirit. Praying is a way of turning to God.

Prayer should not be limited to the time together, but people should pray for each other while apart.

## **Attending to God in Scripture**

Our spiritual health is vastly affected by our time spent in scripture. Although God is experienced in life, he often speaks to us through scripture. Spiritual friends should explore scripture together and share how they have received from God through his word. This does not need to involve scripture study, but rather simply be sharing how the scriptures have challenged and impacted you. This is important in becoming familiar with God's perspective on the problems and opportunities in life. Scripture should also be the grounds for our advice. It is always tempting to offer advice to our friends, but this advice should be grounded in scripture.

## **Study**

Friends might agree to pursue a specific study in scripture or in another book. This will help provide structure to the meeting and will provide some activity to be pursued in between meetings. Studies may focus on a variety of topics and should be chosen in order to enhance spiritual growth. (For suggested resources see section 8 below)

## **Encouragement in Disciplines**

There are a variety of personal spiritual disciplines that God uses for our spiritual growth. (See section below) Spiritual friendships and mentoring situations can be excellent opportunities to encourage one another in the pursuit of God in these disciplines. Just as physical exercise is easier in the company of others, so too spiritual exercises become more enjoyable when encouraged by another. Perhaps there are specific disciplines that you might experiment with and explore together. As you get together, you can share how these disciplines are working.

## **Enjoy Life Together**

Often our spiritual intimacy is enhanced when we take the time to work and play with our friends. As we do things together, we not only talk, but we learn from example and gain clarity into the life of our friend.

## **Dangers and Pitfalls**

### **Camaraderie in Sin:**

One particular danger is found when two individuals struggle with the same sin and instead of grieving over this sin, confessing it and struggling to resist temptation, they take a solace that they are not alone and begin to think that the sin is acceptable, because it is held in common. Although it is good to see that others have similar struggles, this should not be taken as an invitation to give up struggling.

Guard against the attitude that says you forgive me and I'll forgive you and we'll do it again next week. Do not be quick to affirm forgiveness if there is no true attitude of grief over sin. Furthermore guard against accountability without confession.

### **Unnecessary Authority:**

Spiritual Friendships and Mentoring relationships should not become controlling. It is not our place to give excessive advice or seek to direct the life of our friend. Advice should not be avoided, but should rest on the authority of scripture. Furthermore, our role should not be that of therapist or physiologist. Rather we are partners seeking God. We are to help each other connect with God and through the Spirit conquer habits of sin and to grow spiritually. We should rarely prescribe solutions and always offer advice in love, prayer and the wisdom of scripture. It is good to share the wisdom of experience, but we should not seek to force our friend to do things our way. Our first priority is to look for God in every situation.

### **Tyranny of Small Talk:**

Small talk has a time and a place, but we must be careful not to fall into a pattern where the only topics of conversation are sports, family or what we did last week. In every situation we should look for God. If you are talking about your family try to take it to the next level and ask how God would want you to respond in the situation or how God is teaching you or has taught you through a particular interaction. It is good to talk about life, but do not divorce God from it.

### **Failure to Pray:**

We are not the source of change or growth in our life or the life of our friend. God uses friends, but God is in control of all change. As such we must maintain dependence on God and take things to him in prayer. Failure to pray is a sure sign of self reliance or reliance on others.

## Diagnosing Spiritual Health

In this world of distraction, we often don't know what categories to think about when we examine our spiritual lives? Some one might say "How are you doing spiritually?", we do not know how to respond. Perhaps it will be helpful to see that spirituality (love for God) falls into several categories and each category has a wide range of issues. These questions are not exhaustive, but they do give us a broad perspective on Christian spirituality. We need to ask these questions of ourselves and find trustworthy relationships where we allow others to ask us these questions.

Obedience: Loving God means obedience to His word

1. Are there any sinful patterns in my life, which I am refusing to deal with?
2. Have I lacked integrity in any of my financial dealings?
3. Have I been proud or sought the praise of men?
4. Have I entertained lustful thoughts / images / relationships?
5. Have I been greedy for gain?
6. Am I entertaining jealousy, anger or hatred towards others?
7. Do I grieve over sin?
8. Do I take the time to understand Gods will as revealed in scripture?
9. Has called me to do something that I have not yet done?

Relationships: Loving God includes loving others

1. Have I spent time and expressed love to my family?
2. How are my friendships? Any danger signs? Any conflicts?
3. Are there any people I am unwilling to forgive?
4. Are there any people I must ask forgiveness?
5. Am I doing my best to live at peace with all people?
6. Have I expressed kindness and refrained from rudeness?
7. Am I leaning towards any relationship that my compromise my marriage?
8. Am I honoring my parents?
9. Are you in a relationship that is pulling you away from God?
10. Are there people I am having a difficult time loving?
11. Am I showing respect for God's creation?

Relating to God: Loving God includes opening yourself to God's grace and desiring to know him better.

1. Do I go to God in prayer at various times during the day?
2. Am I regularly spending time in God's Word?
3. Am I regularly expressing your love for God in worship?
4. Is there anything in my life which is testing my faith in God?
5. Is there anything that is causing me to doubt?
6. Is there anything that is taking the place of God in my life?
7. What is distracting me from God?
8. Have I included God in my decision making?
9. Where have I seen God work in my life lately? (internally and externally)
10. Am I looking for the work of God in my life?
11. Am I regularly connected with God's people?

Ministry: Loving God includes working for his kingdom

1. How am I involved in serving others?
2. Am I seeking to share my faith with others?
3. How am I an encouragement to others? Have I been critical?
4. Am I using my resources for God's kingdom?
5. Am I praying for others?
6. Am I doing my work for Christ and in a way that brings honor to Him?
7. Am I using my gifts and abilities for God?
8. Am I ministering to the poor and broken?
9. Am I taking time to care for my health and emotional well being?
10. Am I contributing to society in a positive way?
11. Is my job and/or family life crowding God out of my life?

In order to gain a balanced perspective on our spiritual health it is important to ask a wide range of questions. In a spiritual friendship, individuals should take the time to look at questions in all four different categories. Do not avoid the tough questions.

Not every question need be asked every time you meet together, but over time, each question should be touched on. Perhaps there are some that need to be reviewed weekly, while others could be reviewed on a less frequent basis.

## **Personal Spiritual Disciplines**

Although the Spirit of God is the source of all spiritual growth, we are called to cooperate with God in the process. Spiritual Disciplines are ways in which we open ourselves to the transforming power of God.

As discussed above, spiritual friendships are excellent opportunities to explore and develop spiritual disciplines. The following materials are meant to provide some basic guidelines in some of these disciplines in order that they might be developed in the context of spiritual friendships and mentoring relationships.

### **Prayer:**

Prayer is one of the most important ways we connect with God. In Richard Foster's book titled "Prayer", he describes three different categories of prayer, which are helpful in understanding prayer as a spiritual discipline. He describes prayer as:

- a) Moving Inward – Seeking personal transformation
- b) Moving Upward – Seeking intimacy with God]
- c) Moving Outward – Seeking to minister to others
- d)

All three of these categories are ultimately focused on God, for we seek personal transformation and love others because we love God. All prayer is God centered.

Having said this, however, it is helpful to examine these three categories.

#### Prayer for Personal Transformation

These forms of prayer include petitions for personal spiritual needs. They deal with aspects of repentance and guidance. Under this heading we would place prayers of confession, prayers of relinquishment and prayers that grapple with seeking God's will.

This form of prayer produces godliness, because it inherently seeks to deal with sin through reflection and confession and seeks God's direction and perspective on circumstances.

#### Prayers of Divine Intimacy

These sort of prayers are usually not in the form of requests or petitions. This type of prayer is more like spending time in the presence of God. Under this heading we would include prayers of worship, thanksgiving, contemplation and meditation.

This form of prayer produces Godliness, because it is worship. As our attention is increasingly directed to God, our love for Him grows.

## Prayers of Intercession

This is perhaps the most common form of prayer. It involves making requests for the needs of self and others. It is directed to God, but also involves compassion for others.

This form of prayer produces Godliness, because it develops compassion and love for others, which is an important aspect of loving God. It also is an expression of dependence on God.

We will be focusing subsequent classes to some of these forms of prayer, including classes on scripture meditation, worship, reflection/confession and contemplation. This morning we will examine two forms of prayer in more detail, prayers of relinquishment and intercessory prayer.

## **Scripture**

Scripture can be approached in different ways. It can be a guidebook, which is read as a source of information or it can be a love letter, which is read as personal communication. We can read the Bible with our head and with our heart. There are two disciplines of scripture, which correspond to the two approaches, Study and Meditation.

### Study

We study scripture in order to attain a fuller and clearer understanding of scripture, so that we will know the character and will of God. Richard Foster describes study as repetition and concentration that leads to comprehension and reflection.

The foundation of study is reading. Behind all study of scripture is frequent, prayerful and thoughtful reading. Yet study goes beyond mere reading.

### Practical Insights into Scripture Study

1. Study prayerfully. As God to illuminate your understanding.
2. Take a long term approach. Be willing to spend time to discover the meaning of the text. Pay the price of barren days for the sake of clarity of meaning
3. Use different translations to help clarify texts.
4. Ask the questions “What does this say?” and “What does this mean?”
5. Look for the intent of the author / the meaning for the original audience. Look for what the text says and not what you want it to say.
6. Pay attention to context. Seek the relationship of the text to what came before it and after it. Pay close attention to trains of thought and the flow of the story or argument.
7. Pay attention to historical context. Gain an understanding of the cultural background. Who was this written to and why?
8. Do not study in isolation. Use other books and discussion with others.

9. Avoid going to commentaries before attempting to understand the text yourself.
10. Don't stop short with understanding. Rather seek to apply the meaning.

There is no short cut to study. Study takes time and effort. It is good to read scripture, and study should not replace simple reading, but if in reading there is no comprehension, we must turn to study.

### Meditation

Meditation means prayerfully going over and over scripture. It has nothing to do with emptying the mind, but rather with filling it with God's word. Meditation is more personal than study. The purpose is more application than understanding. The core question is "Lord, what are You saying to me through this text?" Scripture study focuses on interpretation whereas scripture meditation focuses on personalizing and internalizing the passage. Meditation involves praying scripture to God and then listening for God's response. In meditation, the written word becomes a living word addressed to us.

Closely aligned to scripture meditation is memorization. Through memorization we internalize scripture and attain the capacity to meditate on it at any time and in any place. Meditation does not require memorization, but it benefits greatly from it.

### Practical Insights into Scripture Meditation

"Communion with God is not something you institute. It's like sleep. You can't make yourself sleep, but you can create the conditions that allow sleep to happen."(Richard Foster) Meditation is about creating the conditions, opening our Bible, reading it slowly, listening to it and reflecting on it.

1. Choose a portion of scripture that is simple and practical. The object is not to cover as much ground as possible, but to sink deeply into what is read.
2. We must begin with a humble seeking attitude. We must seek not so much to analyze as to accept and receive.
3. Read slowly and carefully. Dwell on the words.
4. Use your imagination to sink into the context of the passage. See the sights, hear the sounds and feel the emotion of the passage. Identify with the hearers.
5. Turn the scripture into prayer. Praise God in what you read. Confess sins that scripture reveals. Thank God for blessings. Ask God to make the text real in your life.
6. Be aware of what God is trying to say to you personally from the text.
7. Spend time on the passage. Return to it again and again.

In the end, scripture meditation should lead to application. We should be led into repentance and obedience. Meditation is not primarily designed to provide an emotional experience, though that may happen, it is a way to let God speak to us through his word so that we may respond to him in faith.

## Contemplation

Contemplation is simple attentiveness to the presence of God. It is a form of prayer, which may or may not use words. As we contemplate God, we focus our attention on him, enjoying his presence, entering an attitude of worship and listening to the Holy Spirit. The core aspect of contemplation is the invitation of God into your present moment.

Contemplation is an excellent discipline to use in conjunction with spiritual friendship. For as we pay attention to God throughout the week, we can share with each other and further enhance our awareness of God.

### Contemplating God in Creation

Many of us are familiar with the fact that the beauty of creation can turn our attention to the creator. This is evident especially in Psalm 19. When we contemplate God in creation, we ascribe glory to God the creator.

### Contemplating God in Daily Circumstances.

Do we believe Romans 8:29, which says that all things work together for the good of those who love God? If this is true, God is at work even in the routine events of our day. Are we willing to take the time to discern what God is saying to us. In 1 Corinthians 10:31, we are implored to do all things for the glory of God, even simple tasks like eating and drinking. Contemplation seeks to include God in daily circumstance by inviting him into our present moment.

### Contemplating in Death and Illness

Ecclesiastes 7:1-3 tells us that there is wisdom in contemplating death. Funerals, illnesses and bad news provide us with an opportunity to reflect on eternity and God. Do the frustrations of life turn our attention to God?

In order to train ourselves in this discipline, we will have to begin with forming habits. We will need reminders in order to turn our attention to God. Some suggestions include.

- Begin with looking back. Use examination of consciousness to begin searching for God in your daily lives.
- Use physical reminders such as alarms or signs
- Attach prayers to daily routines. For instance as you dress, think about the armor of God from Ephesians 6.
- Eliminate distractions like car radios and television

As we learn to eliminate distractions and habituate prayer, we will increasingly turn to God throughout the day.

## **Self Examination and Confession**

Confession basically means acknowledging your sin before God. Self Examination is the prayerful reflection on your life that must precede confession. These disciplines provide the basis for accountability within friendships.

How does one go about practicing these disciplines? The following is not meant to be taken as the definitive pattern, but rather received as a model of the important elements.

**Step 1** Recognize that this is a Partnership with the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit who brings conviction. (John 16:8) We do not merely search our hearts but rather invite God to search our hearts (Psalm 139)

Any attempt at self examination that is done without first submitting to God's direction will invariably lead to suspect results. According to Richard Foster, our autonomous self examination will lead to excessive self blame or excessive self praise. We will succumb to our blind spots and beat ourselves up over what we do see. (Jeremiah 17:9)

We must invite the Lord to search our hearts. This is the pattern of Psalm 139:23-24. By prayerfully submitting to God before self examination and confession, we will receive the Lord's guidance.

**Step 2** Examine your Consciousness

This form of self examination is where we prayerfully reflect on the thoughts, feelings and action of the day. We look for where God may be speaking to us from within the ordinary. We notice where we were present to God and where we may have missed God. Foster says that the examination of consciousness "is the means God uses to make us more aware of our surroundings." Not only do we become more aware of the needs of those around us, but we become attentive to the work of God.

**Step 3** Examine your Conscience

This form of examination invites God to search our hearts and reveal why we did the things we did. We may thankfully celebrate the things we did for God's glory and by God's strength. We take note of sinful patterns and motivations so that we might confess them to God. Perhaps having identified sinful patterns that are particular to your life, be sure to reflect on that area each day.

At this point it might be helpful to examine ourselves in light of scriptural categories such as the 10 commandments (Ex 20), The beatitudes (Matt 5), The fruit of the sinful nature and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5 / Col 3) or the 7 deadly sins. Sometimes we fail to see our own sin, because we have a narrow understanding of sin and virtue.

#### Step 4 Make a Heartfelt Confession

Having spent some time in self examination, or as the Lord reveals things to you, confess them to God and declare your intent to follow God. When confessing some things to consider include:

- Be specific in your confession. Tell God why you did whatever you did (not as an excuse, but to confess your sinful motives)
- Ask God to Give you Godly sorrow for your sin. (Matthew 5:4 ; James 4:7-10) Enter into the feelings and don't just casually report facts.
- Don't just ask for forgiveness from the past but declare your intent to follow God by the Spirit in the future.
- Leave the Sin with God. Godly sorrow leads to repentance and leaves no regret (2 Cor 7:10) Perhaps reflect on scriptures that declare God's promises to forgive (1 John 1:9, Psalm 32:5, Psalm 103:7-13)
- When you have offended another person be sure to confess to them as well.

#### Journaling as an Aid to Self Reflection and Confession

Keeping a journal is a good tool for self examination, confession, prayer and scripture meditation. In it you can express your thoughts and prayers to God. The act of writing can help focus your mind and give clarity to your thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, having a written record allows us to look back over previous days and gain a clearer understanding of patterns in our lives and remember God's faithfulness.

Journal keeping helps guide the processes of examining our consciousness and conscience as described above. This is especially evident, when you are reflecting on several things. The amount of thoughts and feeling can become overwhelming unless organized on paper.

There is no right way to journal. Just express yourself as you prayerfully examine your life. Don't be worried about how you sound or the proper spelling of words. Use any practical format from pen and paper to computer. Do it throughout the day or at the end of the day.

## **Suggested Study Materials to Enhance Spiritual Growth**

### **The Journey.**

This is especially suited for mentoring relationships and is designed for discipling new Christians. It is a detailed workbook that sets a good foundation of Christian basics.

### **Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health** by Donald Whitney

Good short book to focus your thoughts on spiritual growth and to help gain a sense of how to measure spiritual health. Better suited for friendship relationships, but also a good mentoring study.

### **How People Grow** by Henry Cloud and John Townsend

More involved book looking at the important building blocks in personal growth. Written by the authors of Boundaries and has a good counseling perspective. Good for friendships and a good resource for mentors.

### **The Purpose Driven Life** by Rick Warren

Helps sharpen your focus on God's purpose for an individual life. Good for friendships and mentoring.

### **Desiring God** by John Piper

More detailed study on how to glorify God by enjoying him forever, what the author calls Christian Hedonism. Helps awaken a sense of delight in God.

### **The Pursuit of God** by A.W Tozer

Called a modest attempt to aid God's hungry children to find him.

### **The Case for Christ or the Case for Faith** By Lee Strobel

Provides an accessible, yet intellectual approach to topics of reason and apologetics. Good for mentoring relationships where a person needs a better grounding in apologetics.

### **Knowing God** by J.I. Packer

More difficult study on the character of God. Good foundation in the majesty of God.

### **Experiencing God** by Henry Blackaby and Claude King

Detailed workbooks are available. Good study especially for Mentoring that looks at knowing and doing the will of God.