



Sunday, April 26, 2020

Spiritual Friendship

Spiritual friendship's desire is: to develop a friendship that encourages and challenges me to love God with all my heart, soul, strength and mind.

Spiritual friendship definition: involves cultivating a covenant friendship where I can naturally share about my life with God, grounded in relationship to God and a commitment to support, encourage, and pray for one another.

For break out room discussion:

- When has God taken the initiative to be a friend to you?
- What sort of friend are you to God and others?
- Who do you talk to about your spiritual life? How has a discerning, encouraging and challenging friend helped you in your journey?

Questions from Spiritual Disciplines Handbook by A. Ahlberg Calhoun:

- Do you turn to someone in a time of crisis, or do you wait until the crisis is over to talk to someone? What does this tell you about yourself?
- Do you need to be needed and appreciated? How does this affect your friendships?

Spiritual Exercises from Spiritual Disciplines Handbook by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun:

1) Take a friend inventory: draw a lifeline and divide it into seven-year segments. Put the initials of friends who have been important to you in each segment. What do you notice about your friendships? What kinds of friends do you tend to gather around you? What might this tell you about yourself?

2) Draw two columns on a piece of paper. Title one "Characteristics of a Spiritual Friend." Title the other "Characteristics of Myself as a Friend." Now fill the columns with your observations. What did you learn about yourself?

3) We can never be a perfect friend. We have limitations and flaws. List your current limitations (physical, time, emotional etc.). Do you want a spiritual friend enough to rearrange your life to have one?

Some guiding principles in being a spiritual friend:

- Give time and patience in friendships for others to feel at home with you.
- Allow one another the freedom to ask questions (about life, about Scripture, about God) without fear.
- Hold others loosely in the sense that you know you are not responsible for everything the other does.
- Encourage your friend(s) to be part of the wider Body or community, which offers even more space to grow in maturity.
- Allow your friend(s) to stand on their own – not clinging to them for your own unfulfilled need.
- Let go of them when the time has come for them to move on (be that to a new place, a new community, to other close friendships).
- Help the other to see the talents and gifts they hold and help them develop and deepen them.
- Be wary of leaving the “healing” task to only specialists (psychologists, counsellors, therapists, pastors etc.). We tend to underestimate our own potential and quickly make referrals to those with titles.
- Know one another – this is done by listening and being willing to face each other’s fears and pains.
- Be personal and pray – most help tends to come in more ordinary ways, like through our personal engagement with each other, our attention to Christ, and prayer.
- Be willing to talk about suffering, acknowledging we don’t have all the answers – hardships and suffering are unique, but also shared.
- Talk about sin – though we might want to avoid this, we all struggle and need each other’s help. We should do this very carefully.

(Points taken from a few sources: Reaching Out, by Henri J. Nouwen, Spiritual Companionship, by David Benner, Caring for One Another, by Edward T. Welch)