

Spiritual direction provides us with the opportunity to attain greater discretion, especially when we consider that it is hard to be objective when our own interests are involved. Our need for individual spiritual guidance is comparable to a person who has been in a closed room for a long time – he does not notice that the air has become stale – whereas one who comes in from the outside notices it immediately. This happens on account of how we often do not understand what is happening in our soul, for as the Prophet Jeremiah said, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9) The human heart is also capable of amazing things which spiritual direction helps us to tap into. In light of this, spiritual direction can greatly assist us because it helps us to grow in our self-knowledge in the light of the Holy Spirit and to become more sensitive to God’s presence and activity in our lives.



The advice we receive in spiritual direction can encourage us to take decisive steps. Such encouragement is often needed because the difficulties we face in discernment are not so much attributed to a *lack of clarity* in our calling but to a *weakness of will* in responding. Many of the great people we meet in the Bible had this difficulty. Their growth in sanctity was greatly assisted by the direction they received from others. For example, when God called Moses to lead his people out of their slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land, he was afraid, weak, and doubtful about his mission. He did not possess the courage to give strong credence to what God was calling him to do. However, this all changed when he was heartened by God through his brother, Aaron. God said to Moses:

Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well; and behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart. And you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do (Ex 4:14-15).

This is just one example from the Scriptures. There are many others, such as:

- the advice Moses received from his father-in-law, Jethro (Ex 18:1-27);
- the encouragement Gideon received about the seemingly impossible mission God entrusted to him when he heard about a Midianite’s dream (Judg 7:13-15);
- the numerous times King David received encouragement and advice from the Prophet Nathan; and
- the confirmation Ananias gave to St Paul about his vision which enabled him to be “increased all the more in strength” (Acts 9:22) to become an Apostle of Christ.

This confirmation we receive from a spiritual director can provide great help, for as St John of the Cross said, “Until consulting another, one will usually experience only tepidity and weakness in the truth, no matter how much may have been heard from God” (*The Ascent of Mt Carmel*, Bk II, ch. 22, no. 12).

*By Fr Michael de Stoop
Archdiocese of Sydney*