



**ART OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT  
REFLECTION ASSIGNMENTS  
MONTH TWO: INCARNATION**

**A. FAITH TRADITION PERSPECTIVE “Wisdom from Eastern Christianity” CD, Richard Groves**

1. Eastern Christian spiritual direction was born in monasteries. But contemporary Thomas Merton says: “There is a little monk inside each of us...”

**Sacred Question:** *What is it that your “little monk” longs for in regard to spiritual growth?*

2. The three traditional pillars for discernment are expressed this way in the Judeo-Christian scripture:

Community: Matthew 18:15-20

Testing of Spirits: 1 John:4:1-3

Trusting the fruit we bear: Luke 6:43-45; Mark 4:1-20

**Sacred Question:** *How are each of these ‘pillars’ operative in your life?*

3. In the Orthodox tradition, the ‘starets’ or spiritual director ideally lived apart from the world?

**Sacred Question:** *How might this concept be understood/translated for our time and culture today? Who and why do you trust another to support your spiritual growth? Where is there danger in “going it alone” in terms of discernment?*

4. The Eastern tradition of spiritual direction could be summed up with three simple teachings:

- Be of few words
- Daily discipline/practice of the director
- Exhort much; rebuke sparingly.

**Sacred Question:** *Which part of this advice most challenges you as prospective spiritual director?*

5. The Eastern tradition calls one to continually respond to the voice of the Spirit and answer the question: Why can’t you believe that God wants you to be happy?

**Sacred Question:** *Do you believe that happiness is a gift from God or are you suspicious of happiness as if the spiritual life should only be about sacrifice and penance?*

**B. FOUNDATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION Care of Mind, Care of Spirit, Gerald May, chap. 2**

1. May names four universal forces affecting human spirituality: p. 25

-Human Longing

-God Longing for Us

-Resistance/Fear of Spiritual Realization

-Evil

- Consider a situation in life when you can identify all or some of these four forces working.
- How did you counterbalance these powerful energies?

2. “In the vast majority of cases, psychological difficulties need not interfere at all with spiritual direction. Instead, they often serve as gifts for the enrichment of one’s spiritual sensitivities. p. 23

- Name a time when deep distress, anxiety or fear became the very catalyst to confront issues of meaning, self and God?

3. "As we discover more about the brain, we are tempted to reduce our spiritual realities to matters of chemistry..." p. 27  
*Reflect on the teaching that, regardless of the biology source of suffering, the essential spiritual question when listening to another is, 'Where is grace in this for you'?*

### **C. DISCERNMENT-IN-PRACTICE "The Spiritual Direction Relationship" CD, Jack Kennedy**

1. "The reason why many persons seek spiritual direction is based on a desire to move from un-freedom to freedom at some level..."

- *Why do you think are we/you typically 'scandalized by our humanity'?*

*Can you name a place in your journey where you have been un-free for a very long time?*

*The job of the director is not to solve the problem but simply to help name it. Where might you still be 'wandering in the dark' of fear, doubt and anxiety...*

2. "Much pain is caused in many people by a religious upbringing that tells them not to trust their own spiritual experience..."

- *Where might you have encountered this tension in your own experience or that of another?*
- *What kind of 'advice' would you offer to a person who is deeply mistrustful of their own experience?*
- *Reflect on the quote that, 'Faith means doubt!'*

3. "When sitting with another in spiritual direction, one question that often helps is, 'Where is there darkness and where is there light in this situation?' "

- *Consider a life situation that you would presently bring to a spiritual director...*

