

Charlotte Spirituality Center

Spiritual Direction Verbatim

Director: Craig

Directee: J

Date of Session: April 19, 2024

Session # 1

Session Location: Presbyterian Pilgrimage Retreat
(after evening chapel)

Introduction: J is in her early 60's and has been a long-time active member and leader in the Pilgrimage Community. She is passionate about her love for Jesus and her desire to serve. While her love for God and others is unquestioned, she sometimes gets stuck in her strong fundamentalist theology especially around the idea that God controls every circumstance and everything that happens, good or bad, is always God's perfect will. She is also very concerned about God's judgment and her need to make sure she does not "disappoint God." Despite her public affirmation about God's deep unconditional love for everyone, she often struggles to believe in that love and acceptance for herself.

In this conversation, J came to me and my wife as pastors / spiritual directors on the retreat with some heavy concerns on her heart. The chapel was dark with the lit crucifix on the wall and everyone else had gone back to their cabins for the night. The following conversation is adapted slightly due to imperfect memory and the need to abbreviate for this verbatim. For the spiritual director parts, I'm only sharing the portions I said and not including those things my wife offered, which were far more helpful to J in the end.

	Dialogue	Thoughts of Director	Feelings of Director	Body Response in Director	Body Response in Directee	Intuition
	<i>J spoke first when she came to us</i>					
D1	I just don't know what to do! (sobbing almost uncontrollably) I just have to tell somebody.	I immediately expected a tragic situation.	Worried	Surprised, but open	Sobbing	Something is really wrong
SD1	Absolutely. How can we help?					
D2	I betrayed Jesus! I'm Judas! I don't know what to do. I don't know if God can ever forgive me.	What????!!! Are we talking about an affair or something?	Confused			
SD2	Tell us what happened.	Respond with calmness & curiosity				
D3	<i>J tells us about her recent trip to Israel where she bought a beautiful cross necklace from a Muslim shop owner. After a quick</i>					

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	<p><i>haggle on the price (as is the expected custom there), she felt she got a really good deal and was excited. The shop owner was excited with her...</i></p> <p>He said, "Praise Allah!" and caught up in the joy of the moment I responded, "Praise Allah!" (more sobbing). I immediately felt sick to my stomach and tried to give the necklace back but he wouldn't take it even when I didn't ask for my money back. I betrayed Jesus...</p>	Seriously? That's what all this is about?	Mixture of humor with deep sadness that such a simple, innocent thing would put her in such deep distress.			This is her fundamentalist theology talking and it is not serving her well right now.
SD3	It sounds like a joyful experience until the end. How do you feel like you betrayed Jesus?					
D4	I praised another God!	She sounds angry that it wasn't obvious to me.			Visibly angry with herself	
SD4	I don't know that you did. "Allah" is just the Arabic word for God and I'm sure you didn't have "another God" in your heart. You were just speaking his language.	In the moment, I slipped into fix-it / theologizing mode	Desire to offer comfort			I don't believe her action matches her feeling of what she did. Trying to bring equilibrium.
D5	But Allah is still a false God. I thanked a false God for a gift only my God could have given me. I'm Judas!	Not the time to challenge her views of God	Angry / frustrated at how theology has ruined this experience for her			

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SD5	What if Judas had good intentions?	Note: I was not thinking like a Spiritual Director in this moment, but as a pastor & theologian. My mind shifted to a sermon I had done about Judas' possible desire to force Jesus' hand and step up to fight for the Kingdom.			A look of shock on her face.	
D6	It says he that Satan entered him. I let the devil in just like he did!	Clearly my intellectual attempts are further triggering her fundamentalist theology.	Feeling a bit tense. I know I am triggered when I see bad theology hurting someone.			Realizing this is a deeply emotional issue that she does not see as a theological problem.
SD6	If Jesus was here with you face to face, what do you think he would say?	Trying to regroup and draw on the theme of Jesus looking on us in love from the cross that we just talked about in chapel.		Sat back, paused, tried to be more at ease		
D7	(long pause) I know he loves me, but he would just be so disappointed in me. I just can't bear that I let him down.	Hopeful that there may be a turning			Tears softened a bit	
SD7	Can you see him looking on you with love?	Drawing again on the shared language of the chapel service. If I had been thinking more like a Spiritual	More relaxed	Breathing more calmly		In her emotional state, she wasn't responding well to questions about what happened, so I

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		Director, I wish I would have asked more about the disappointment or her sense of letting someone down and how else that might be showing up in her life.				thought perhaps I could simply help her extend the chapel moment of sitting with Jesus looking with love from the cross, perhaps it would create the space she needed.
D8	I know. I know. But every time I see the necklace I feel so guilty. I want to send it back, but I can't. I can't wear it. What do I do?	I wanted to offer specific options to her direct question.				She needs to decide that for herself.
SD8	Is there a way you could see it as a reminder of forgiveness & love instead of guilt, even if you don't wear it?	I should have asked what she thought she should do in a more open-ended way.				Question is still too directed.
D9	Maybe. I just don't know how he can forgive me. Judas was never forgiven. He went to hell.		Sad		Head down, looking to the floor	
SD9	We don't know that for sure, but what if Judas had lived... How do you want to live your life going forward from this experience?					

Reflections – This conversation happened before I began training so I was not thinking like a Spiritual Director, but it makes me think a lot about how Spiritual Direction could have helped me respond differently. My wife, also a pastor, was able to respond at a more emotional level and grieve with J in a way that I couldn't because I was too stuck in my head with seemingly obvious theological answers. There was a lot longer period of simply sitting with J and letting her cry it out, and she seemed to have a new resolve the next day to move forward from this guilt that had weighed her down for months. It seemed what she needed most was the simple sacramental act of confession which, as one Jesuit priest told me, is never about punishment but always about a way forward.