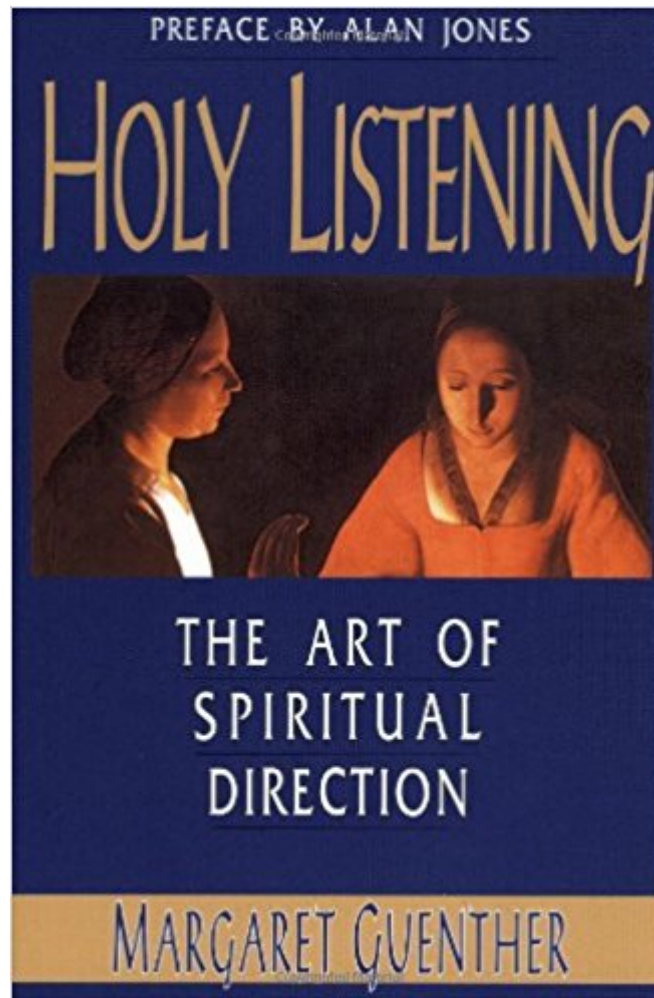




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Holy Listening: The Art Of Spiritual Direction



Synopsis

Guenther uses the images of the spiritual director as host, teacher, and midwife to describe the ministry of spiritual direction today. She pays particular attention to spiritual direction for women, and addresses such down-to-earth questions as setting, time, and privacy. The stories of real people bring the practice of spiritual direction alive. “In the pages that follow, I will attempt to describe the shape that spiritual direction might take for people of our time, aware that the subject is an elusive one. I am speaking to the beginner, those persons lay or ordained, with or without formal theological training, who find themselves drawn to this ministry. Perhaps they feel the stirring of their own unacknowledged gifts. Or perhaps they wonder about receiving direction, whether it is a ministry available to ‘ordinary people’ or reserved for the especially holy. I hope some dark corners will be illuminated and some questions answered.”

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a solid introduction to the art of guiding others in Christian spiritual growth. Guenther, wife, mother, Episcopal priest, and seminary professor, uses feminine images, especially midwifery, to describe the director's role, but insists that both women and men can assist spiritual birth. Her treatment is thoroughly human, and at the same time she is considerate of gender issues. Guenther focuses on sins of self-hatred and self-contempt as well as pride and greed. An excellent addition to its field, this is for seminary and public libraries. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In the very best sense, hers is a book of non-direction: earthed and wise, compassionate and unsentimental, practical and contemplative.

I had to read this book as a part of the curriculum for the Charlotte Spirituality Center in Charlotte, NC and then write a reflective paper on it... this is that... If you are even thinking of reading this book you simply must!!! Like a masterful artist who is knowledgeable about how to mix and tint all sorts of colors and then paint a portrait that would cause the onlooker to get lost in it's beauty, so is Margaret Guenther with her words within the pages of Holy Listening. Whether it is weaving together practical insights such as how to prepare director-self and room, or touching upon the sensitivities of the role as midwife, and the comparison of stages of physical birth to spiritual rebirthing; Guenther skillfully places story within teaching concept to make for a most delightful read. Bringing together characters from real life, biblical text, and historic Christendom she very practically elaborates on topics such as silence, knowing when to share from personal experience, the art of listening, asking good questions, the role of the feminine in spirituality and how it both differs and compliments it's male counterpart. While the topics she touches and illuminates are holy and meant to empower transformation of the soul, she brings the reader back to earth time after time, least we forget that it is the whole person we sit and interact with. Serving and reminding us often that it is the small tasks of the earth alongside the meditations of heavenly truths that bring forth true and lasting change. I liken reading Holy Listening to sitting at the feet of the old Appalachian granny that she talks about within the book's pages. Guenther has done as she describes of them, she has traveled over the rough terrain of a ministry taught and dominated by men and come to the remote places so that another perspective can be gleaned for us all. She brings to us a balanced and intuitive approach touching sensitive topics of masculine perspective and feminine touch. Sharing that the concept of midwife while historically feminine is not necessarily always female and brings forth clarification, "It is important to remember, though," writes Guenther, "that the midwife is not necessarily a wife, or even a woman. The literal meaning of the word is 'with-woman,' that is, the person who is with the birthgiver. There are the phrases that my heart felt so drawn towards such as, 'birthgiver,' 'holy listener,' 'guest-giver,' 'guest-friendship,' and 'the slow work of God.' Each image she painted birthed within my heart the hunger to be an amateur like her one day. And there were the quotes. From the

words of Aelred on page 15, "Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst," to the words of Madonna Kolbenschlag towards the end of the book. "Madonna Kolbenschlag speaks of the 'moment of atheism,' when the woman lets go of her outgrown faith, ceasing to rely on 'authorities' and trusting herself. I was so personally moved by the fourth chapter on women and spiritual direction that I not only gleaned wisdom from her instruction but felt my own inner transformation as she named my very own experience and gave me language to name it for myself. It was in reading her text that I made a page in my notebook entitled, "questions." In the simple ways she suggests opening up with a new directee to also providing those questions one would more skillfully wrought towards the movement further down the road, I felt empowered and gently both taught and led upon a path that I must follow. Far from a cold and classical look at Spiritual Direction this woman brought me a cold compress for my head and the shoes of peace which can shod my feet and lead me in the ways of Christ and this ministry. She empowered me to hold in tension those things that can not be fixed as well as strengthened my own heart to search out, name and discover even more for myself and my own growth. This book is a masterful tool box full of simple and profound suggestions, heavenly and earthly components, and stories of my Lord and those that make up the great cloud of witnesses that will now undergird me as I walk forward on this path.

Over the past year I have read several books covering the topic and practice of spiritual direction. Counting my present experience, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* ranks among the very best that I have read to date. This guide, written by Margaret Guenther, is unlike some of the other books on this subject that I have read. First, let me say that spiritual direction is not a discipline or art that can be necessarily taught. There are certain tools that can be shared and there is experiential wisdom that might be communicated to help perspective "guides" and directors, but spiritual direction cannot be taught from a clinical perspective. When speaking of "soul" therapy there remains much mystery, especially when considering that the vast majority of the work done in spiritual direction is done by the Holy Spirit of God. Disclaimer aside, *Holy Listening* does not attempt to "teach" spiritual direction, but instead, Margaret Guenther humbly shares a lifetime of her experience as a "holy listener" and soul friend. The book is just under one hundred fifty pages long and divided into only four chapters. The first chapter reminds the reader that each soul is to be welcomed as Christ; *Welcoming the Stranger*, refers to the Rule of St. Benedict (Chapter 53: Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ, for He is going to say, "I came as a guest, and you

received Me"). This is a delightful chapter full of real-life insight that offers bountiful wisdom gleaned from years of holy listening. Each page of this chapter drips humility from Guenther and points to God as the true guide in the work of spiritual direction. Chapter two is the longest chapter in the book and my favorite. I think it offers the most practical wisdom and instruction in Holy Listening. I just checked my copy of the book and I think every page but three or four have some type of highlighting or note written on them. Let me reemphasize that the style of the book is not teaching method, but sharing experience and because of this style of sharing there is an invaluable amount of wisdom and insight gleaned. The personal stories, both successes and errors, are related with honesty and care. I found reading the stories themselves a holy experience for me. Chapters three and four provided unique challenges to me as a male. Chapter three is written using the metaphor of a midwife to describe the work of the spiritual director. I had to take my time and open my mind to the metaphor, but the effort was worth it. Once I reached the half-way point of the "midwife" chapter, this wonderful metaphor began to yield bountiful fruit. Chapter four addressed specific challenges and distinctive to ministry and direction to women (chapter titled: Women and Spiritual Direction). I'm sure this will be a valuable chapter for me at some point and I will probably refer to again and again in the future, but I must admit that I was a bit lost for the majority of this chapter. I write this confession as a man who has been married almost twenty-four years and a man who was raised with two sisters. I have experience with the nature of the female, but much of what was shared in this final chapter was a bit outside of my experience. This really was a wonderful book. It is one of the best I have read on the art of spiritual direction. There is nothing systematic or technical about it, but I don't think there is a more complete approach to the subject of being a soul friend than any other book I have read to date. I'm confident to recommend this work to anyone who might be considering this type of counseling. It is a gem and a gift to the person called to spiritual guidance and direction.

A good book for anyone who is seeking to grow spiritually. It is aimed at someone who is or aspires to be a Spiritual Director. For me, as simply a seeker, there was a lot that helped my quest.

This book was a part of my course work during my SD training. In Holy Listening, Guenther offers some brilliant insight into the world of spiritual direction. Her thoughts on the "host/guest" paradigm was key to my formational ideas around offering direction. The section on director as a midwife to the soul truly helped shape my thinking and understanding of this very beautiful, slow and transforming work that is spiritual direction. I would highly recommend this book. In particular, the

1st and 3rd sections.

I purchased this book for my Spiritual Direction class. This book was very informative and I learned so much especially the art of listening.. The book was a very easy read and had very useful information. I highly recommend this book to be used as a reference book that you will use over and over.

Well written and a must especially for the beginning student.

The heart needed to be a spiritual director is revealed here. It also provides practical advice from experience as well as warnings against dangers. The chapter on "Women and Spiritual Direction," which discusses how our culture leads many women to act a certain way as directors and as directees, was very thought-provoking.

Holy Listening is like a long visit with a wise teacher and friend.

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