

# MEN'S ISSUES AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

## Common Elements of Men and Women in Spiritual Direction

Donald Bisson, FMS, D.Min.

1. On a journey....in, through, with, to God
2. Unconditionally loved by God – need love
3. Finding resistance to the process, sabotage
4. Seek wholeness and healing (consciously and unconditionally)
5. Enter stages of development
6. Cannot do it alone – may seek someone like a spiritual director
7. Have struggle with images of God
8. Experiences: breakthroughs, breakdowns (Dark Night Experiences)
9. Experience Grace and Sin, alienation/conversion
10. Fear of letting go, change
11. Need religious practices/ solitude/ prayer
12. Formed by relationships/ marriage/ community
13. Called to practice charity and justice
14. Fear of self disclosure/ to heal/ to grow
15. Are constantly learning and growing – never finished

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Masculine and Feminine Ways of Process  
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Masculine Modality

Feminine Modality

Insight and theory

Experience and emotion

Deeper into the insight

Deeper into the emotion

Ah,ah

ah,ah

Opens into emotion

Opens into insight

Integration of both

Integration of both

1. Both modalities are O.K., but we will be more comfortable in one or the other.
2. Given the nature of the group being male and female, the presenters, directors, communities, etc, you will be exposed to both processes.
3. We need to respect differences. We may grow the most where we are most different.
4. One is not more spiritual, holistic or more mature by using one or the other.
5. Avoid rash judgments and face the interior challenges.

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1. Performance vs. Being...Men have social conditioning where their identity becomes focused on performance, not on relationships and being. They may have fear of not doing direction right.
2. Men's typology tends to be more E.S.T. therefore less men language spiritual experiences in intuitive and introverted ways. Their spiritualities need to be affirmed. Male directees of INFT types suffer various forms of marginalization.
3. From men's dreams, many have images of frozen wastelands which indicate depths of inaccessible feelings. Spring thaws feel threatening and overwhelming. They are protecting against flooding at times when they hold back.
4. The culture is extremely homophobic. Boys are terrified of being teased, of being called a sissy. Men have blocked many inner feelings and movements so when they emerge as adults, shame is often the first feeling.
5. Men are often dependent on women for feelings, intuition and inner work. All directors – especially women – need not articulate the man's feelings and inner experiences. He needs to develop that capacity on his own.
6. For divorcees or widowers, male single parents find themselves alone. The direction relationship becomes a significant bonding and healing for men who have experienced these losses, and a place of witnessing their story.

7. When a man brings himself fully to God, he may experience the rising of grief feelings. Men have repressed grief due to its vulnerabilities and social rejection of men grieving. Grief work becomes a key awakening of God.
8. A much larger percentage of men have been sexually abused as boys than was ever realized in the past. These wounds may surface when a relationship of trust and unconditional acceptance has been formed. Appropriate therapeutic counseling will be necessary.
9. There are some men who have “puer eternalis” psychological structures. They may seem spiritual to the director initially, but they will be led to more groundedness in body, limits, aging and pain in order to grow spiritually.
10. Transference issues may arise due to unfinished business from childhood. The good/bad father or mother may be constellated in the directee to the director. Consciousness on the part of the director is necessary and material brought to supervision.
11. Men and addiction issues...isolation, shame should be “in control,” 12-step spirituality, opening to the Divine. Sexual addictions are often symptoms of deep desire, longing for God, thirst for the numinous in an idolatrous kind of way. It is a way to God.
12. Men’s Archetypal Imbalances: King, Warrior, Magician, Lover. Need for all four to be accessed. Know that men who move out of the shadow of these archetypes are opened to *conversion*.
13. Life’s events are key experiences of Divine Presence in the Male...
  - \* becoming a father (dying of sonship to abusive father images)
  - \* divorce issues
  - \* death of parents
  - \* change of jobs
  - \* elder generative years

14. Initiation needs...men are made not born. Particular unfinished business may erupt especially if the director is a male. There are special mentoring needs which are constellated. Mid life is a critical spiritual time for the search for meaning. Men will most likely seek direction when initiation needs emerge.
- 15 Men are sometimes fearful of becoming “spiritual” as a fear of feminization, loss of connectedness to former self, control, a call to come out or the “closet” of spirituality. Men’s spirituality can be a support to their openness to their spiritual hunger.
16. There may be particular needs of men who identify themselves as a sexual minority. The image of God, the wounds of organized religion emerge in the direction process.
17. Men have a particular need to share their work lives and a need to see spirituality in the workplace, since so much time and energy is spent at work.
18. Ministers and “professional” religious men often split off their shadows; and have a need to be perfect before their congregations and families. God as *unconditional lover* is preached but not necessarily believed in themselves..
19. Men have similar problems with some images of God from the past. “Father” or “Mother” images are held onto but may be appropriate to move beyond. This brings forward the “Father” wound.
20. Resistances in the process of spiritual direction with men may be seen in: forgetting appointments, more isolation, more work emphasis, rejection of feelings, shortened sessions, wanting to be *fixed* from problems, etc.
21. Spirituality links men back to the “inner boy”. There emerges more playfulness, spontaneity, and joy, back into their lives. The man finds inner freedom from inner work. They may feel awkward with these feelings at first.

22. Midlife men need to consciously connect to their “anima” or feminine side to go more deeply to God. This journey is *not* only to create balance but to go into deeper masculinity.
  
23. Men tend to be less connected to their bodies than women. If they have been abandoned, abused in any way, their body connection will be even more damaged. The emerging of spirituality will demand a compensation with body connection.
  
24. Like women, men have been both hurt and helped by traditional religion. Since men tend to do less relating to organized religion, their images of religion and God may seem to be very childish. Some can also be easily seduced into fundamentalism.
  
25. Among some men, there is a shame at being male because so often the “humane” qualities are associated with women and “brutal” qualities are associated with men. This shame or vision must be detoxified to deal with their spiritualities.

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### HEALING THE FATHER WOUND

#### Liberating Male Truths

1. I can live out of my deepest Self and be a loving, wise, and powerful male adult.
2. The male unconscious is a mythological source to uncover a man's personal story, which can lead him through his dreams to a meaningful life.
3. My old myths which have stifled my spirituality come from survival techniques, I can go beyond survival into my true Self.
4. My myths can change and I *can heal*
5. I need to seek help and reach out when needed. Healing implies mentoring, or *whatever* I need to accomplish my freedom.
6. I can never become perfect. My wound however can become sacred and a place of honor no matter how I received it from my father. I can become whole by learning wisdom from my experience.
7. I cannot hold on to external stimulus only. To change myself, I must look *inward* to healing to a new connection to the Sacred Self.

**MEN'S ISSUES AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**  
**“In Our Father's Kingdom”**

**Common Aspects of  
Father Wound**

**God  
Issues**

Invisibility

Shaming techniques

Neglect

Fear of showing up

Authoritarian

Powerless

Only obedience required

no real relationship

Initiation through loss of self-  
esteem, respect

Never completely initiated  
spiritually, fear driven

Rejection or living out of shadow

Non-trustable

Rage – passive or active

Not safe

Perfectionism – no mistakes  
Never good enough

Judging every feeling and  
emotion

Work as addictive,  
diminished activity

Killing off creativity

Materialism and spiritual  
fraudulence

Distrust of intuition and  
unseen experiences

Sent into exile: emotionally,  
physically, spiritually

Wonder if there is a  
spiritual home

Learning by default and alone

Loss of wisdom

## **MEN'S ISSUES AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**

### **Men's Issues: Recovery, Healing, and Spiritual Awakening**

Griffen, Dan. A Man's Way Through the Twelve Steps.  
Haseldon, 2009

Keating, Thomas. Divine Therapy and Addiction  
Lantern Books, 2009

“With the twelve steps it is a spirituality of shedding parts of our costume, we begin to see the limitless possibilities for who we can be and how we can live our lives.”

**Step 1:** We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable.

- powerlessness as unmanly
- “who wants to admit complete defeat”
- allowing another to know some part of our life has become unmanageable
- living the paradox of defeat as a movement to victory

**Step 2:** Come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

- going beyond ego control as the highest value
- allowing fear to come into our experience and to depend on someone who is more powerful
- restoration of sanity is breaking out of isolation

**Step 3:** Made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him.

- move beyond old God imagery
- willfulness to willingness
- progress, not perfection is the goal, not one event
- there is a new need to align ourselves with truth.

**Step 4:** Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

- fear of rejection
- shame is the great blockage which feeds the addiction
- facing our resentments, shadows and fears
- letting go of being victim and take responsibility
- courage is doing the right thing when you are scared

**Step 5:** Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrong.

- it is a cleansing to appropriately self disclose
- open yourself to greater intimacy
- it is overcoming the fear of being loveable

**Step 6:** We are entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

- letting go of our childish ways
- we have defects but we are not defective
- what you resist will persist
- you surrender to your humanity and let God deal with you.

**Step 7:** Humbly asked Him to remove our short-comings.

- humility, not humiliation, based on self knowledge
- we must choose a God driven character building rather than comfort
- recognize to depend on the greater one
- the deeper moral re-orientation of life is coming through.

**Step 8:** Made a list of all persons we had harmed and become willing to make amends to them all.

- you can rejoin the community through bridge building
- it invites us back to commune with the appropriate amends
- asking forgiveness allows someone to live in one's own skin.

**Step 9:** Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

- it is also about forgiveness of self
- it is about changing our behavior from the core

**Step 10:** Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it,

- this is a daily commitment to remain sober
- it is the spiritual discipline of the examen, not for perfection but for fidelity to the process
- it is the surrender of the petty, immature, reactive, hypersensitive and self centered self
- admitting wrong is acknowledgment of our humanness

**Step 11:** Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out

- it is integration of authentic relationship with God
- it is about guidance and grace for action
- it is the healing place of gratitude which causes sobriety to deepen
- practice of silence, solitude and meditation

**Step 12:** Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

- to reach beyond self and moving to a life of service
- to reach and touch others lives fuels generativity and new life
- we cannot make the journey alone and therefore others also need us not to make it alone
- this step brings us full cycle back to the world.

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1. Reflect upon a male directee, or friend, companion. What are the main issues which he brings to direction or shares with you?
2. What insights or perspectives discussed today shed new light on his spiritual journey?
3. What do you wish to bring from this workshop to your ministry/relationship to men?