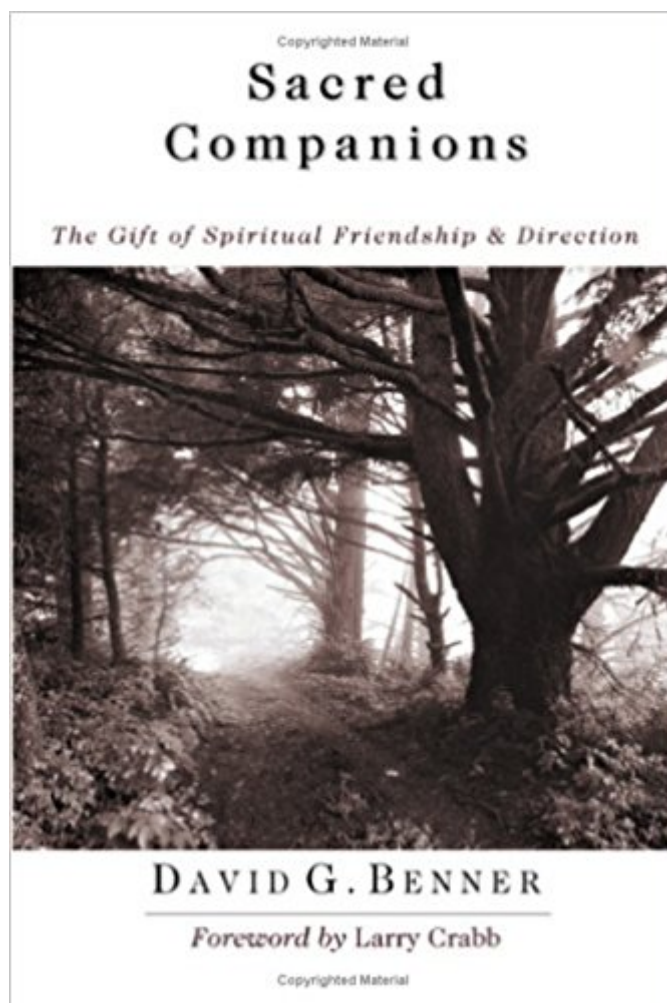


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# Sacred Companions: The Gift Of Spiritual Friendship & Direction



## Synopsis

An ECPA 2003 Gold Medallion Finalist! We need companions on our spiritual journey. The modern world has taught us to value autonomy and individualism. Our churches often see spirituality as personal and private. But we cannot go long in our Christian pilgrimage before realizing that isolation leads to spiritual barrenness. We soon discover that our souls long for accompaniment, intimacy and spiritual friendship. As a result, many Christians today are rediscovering the ancient practice of spiritual direction. In this inviting guide, David G. Benner introduces readers to the riches of spiritual friendship and direction, explaining what they are and how they are practiced. Spiritual direction moves beyond mere moral lifestyle accountability and goes deeper than popular notions of mentoring or discipling. Through prayerful, guided attunement to God's activity, sacred companions provide care for the soul. If we are to experience significant spiritual formation and growth, our souls must be nurtured through spiritual companions. Benner, well-accustomed to God's work through relationships, models the kind of traveling companion who can move us toward deeper intimacy with God.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Spiritual direction is in vogue, although like so many other practices found in contemporary spiritual expression, it's a time-honored discipline for spiritual development. Benner, with impressive credentials in depth-psychology and psychoanalysis and author or editor of multiple books in the field, gives evangelical Christians a gentle introduction to spiritual direction and friendship, and to

the mystical knowledge of God in which these practices are rooted. He acknowledges early in the book the skepticism of his intended audience. "Protestants are often suspicious of mysticism," he writes, linking this observation to a criticism of excessively intellectual processing of God's word as revealed in the Bible and as proclaimed from the pulpit by centuries of preachers. There is another way of knowing God, Benner suggests, and spiritual direction is a useful and legitimate tool for working toward this theologically unimpeachable aim. He uses the Protestant-friendly language of "spiritual discipline" and "prayer" and widens the meaning of these terms by adding Catholic figures such as Ignatius Loyola, Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen to the mix. He also draws upon early Christian history and its practice of centering prayer. His writing is occasionally repetitive and abstract too many words circling around a core of meaning. On the whole, however, Benner's book represents a vital attempt to stoke the fire of spirit in order to grow in Christian faith. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"This book--written for those who see life as a spiritual journey--seamlessly blends a wise understanding of human nature, Christian spirituality and Protestant theology into a work that will help us all in our quest to know and experience God." (Mark R. McMinn, Rech Professor of Psychology, Wheaton College)"Benner's book represents a vital attempt to stoke the fire of spirit in order to grow in Christian faith." (Publishers Weekly)"In the journey to the heart, we are made to look at and to walk with one another. We are incapable of seeing our own self, except in the eyes of a soul mate and with the direction of a personal guide. According to the ancient wisdom of the desert fathers, we all resemble precious stones that constitute community. David Benner offers a refreshing and refined concept of spiritual mentoring, showing us how these stones may be transformed by being softened from their raw sharpness to a constructive roundness through sacred conversation and companionship. Easy to read yet profoundly insightful, almost natural in its nurturing approach, this book introduces readers to the gradual process of genuine presence in spiritual friendship, partnership, marriage and small groups." (John Chryssavgis, Professor of Theology, Holy Cross School of Theology, and author of *Soul Mending: The Art of Spiritual Direction*)"Readers of this book by David Benner will, I predict, feel the fresh wind of the Spirit blowing into and through their souls. They will be better equipped to join the revolution of leaving the 'old way' behind, the way of living comfortably in this world. And they will more deeply yearn to live in the 'new way' of seeking God and living for him in this disappointing world until they wake up in the next one, where eternal satisfaction is guaranteed." (Larry Crabb, from the foreword)"Read,

apply and reflect on David Benner's book, and you could expand your spiritual understanding, strengthen your prayer life, grow in your walk with God, deepen your friendships and clarify your knowledge of spiritual direction. The book could become a classic. It continues to impact me, and I recommend it enthusiastically to you." (Gary R. Collins, Ph.D., author of *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* and *Christian Coaching*) "David G. Benner is a pioneer in the movement to blend insights from psychology with the wisdom of Christian spirituality. His latest work, *Sacred Companions*, is further evidence for the importance of his voice for those who desire to better understand soul care and transformation. This book has both substance and accessibility. It will inspire the reader's own spiritual journey while simultaneously providing instruction on how to be a spiritual friend and director for others. Perhaps the greatest gift this book provides is its inviting portraits of the process of spiritual friendship and direction. I believe *Sacred Companions* will be around for a long, long time." (Gary W. Moon, Vice President, Psychological Studies Institute, director, Charlie Shedd Institute for Clinical Theology) "I eagerly await every one of Dr. Benner's books. This one has not disappointed me. He has produced a thorough and practical guide on one of the most important spiritual topics of our day. A landmark book which I am delighted to recommend highly." (Rev. Selwyn Hughes, Founder and Director, Crusade for World Revival) "Unfettered from any particular church tradition, and uncluttered from theological or psychological jargons, David Benner has written with such elegance and clarity on the deep and profound subject of spiritual friendship and direction. I believe this book would help the church worldwide reclaim and redeem its birthright--the ministry of the care of souls." (Simon Yiu-Chuen Lee, Associate Professor, and Director of the Pastoral Institute, Alliance Bible Seminary, Hong Kong) "In an increasingly consumer-driven and materialistic world, the human longing for love and meaning in life cries out for satisfaction. David Benner's book is timely in introducing a way to fill that longing. Using his extensive experience in psychology and counseling, and the rich tradition of Christian spirituality, Benner skillfully weaves together various ways of developing spiritual friendships and using such relationships in one-to-one encounters, group settings and marriage, to bring about healing, transformation and growth. Benner's warm, relational and practical approach is very insightful and helpful. This book is an important contribution to a growing discussion on bringing together spirituality and psychology, spiritual direction and counseling, and holiness and wholeness." (Bishop Dr. Robert Solomon, The Methodist Church in Singapore) "A wise and winsome guide for all who are serious about seeking and cultivating spiritual direction and its friendships on life's journey. Who better to trust than a writer whose wife is his closest companion!" (James M. Houston, emeritus professor of spiritual theology, Regent College) "Many Christians in our day are

discovering (or rediscovering) ancient wisdom about the Way of Christ that brings life. David Benner is a welcome guide on this journey, both because of his clarity and because he, too, is a pilgrim." (John Ortberg, Teaching Pastor, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, Menlo Park, California)"David Benner has written a very good book on spiritual friendship and spiritual direction, including how to combine the two in the context of small groups and in marriage. I highly recommend Sacred Companions for your reading and spiritual blessing." (Siang-Yang Tan, Professor of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary)"This is one of the best evangelical books I have read on the topic. I plan to recommend it both to those seeking more informal spiritual friendships and to those engaging in formal spiritual direction." (Leighton Ford, President, Leighton Ford Ministries, Charlotte, North Carolina)"Only real depth will serve us now. The marketplace of possibilities has sent the Western mind and heart into a tailspin. David Benner's excellent teaching is a way out of the tailspin and into the depth. This is mature religion and will feed us well." (Rev. Richard Rohr, O.F.M., Center for Action and Contemplation, Albuquerque, New Mexico)

This book provides an invaluable introduction to spiritual direction (I'm a newbie). The author and I are both Protestants, which makes it easier for me to understand what he's talking about. Just as the author, I have also found the spirituality as offered by the Protestant tradition to be wonderful, but falls short in attuning to God's presence. The first part, Spiritual Friendship, obviously, is important for the author since he placed it in the beginning, but is not as practical as spiritual direction (part two) in which he provided spiritual direction dialogues. I love part two because it provides ways to help people to be more attuned to God's presence, which address the insufficiency of the Protestant tradition. I also find part three (spiritual direction among small groups) extremely helpful. Due to the popularity of the small group ministry, the suggestions in this book can balance the current situation that is leaned toward cognitive Bible studies.

This book is an exceptionally good introduction to the meaning of personal relationships that are called "spiritual friendship" and "spiritual direction". Good spiritual formation doesn't happen well on a purely individual level. It's important to have some trusted person(s) with whom one can discuss just about anything and be vulnerable and open. American Protestant Christianity in particular has been too individualistic for its own good. The "just me and Jesus" mindset works out little better than "just me" without a third person who is just as committed to life as a spiritual journey being there to observe and help discern the direction of the Holy Spirit in one's life. David Benner does a very good job of clearly describing the qualities and characteristics of spiritual friendship and

spiritual direction, how they differ from each other and from other similar relationships like counseling, life coaching, discipleship, etc. and how then can be combined in a small group setting or (even!) within the marriage relationship. I highly recommend this book for those who want a good basic understanding of what it means to be "sacred companions". This is a much needed ministry within the church today. I'm very thankful for the people who have filled this role in my life.

I am reading this book as it was recommended by our minister for a small group. I do underline and mark key concepts as I read and I have done quite a bit in this book. I like the concepts in this book and the theory of spiritual friendship, but it leaves me feeling a bit unsettled. It seems like such a simple concept, spiritual friendship, but it's actually difficult to achieve, mostly because it requires solitude and stillness in ourselves. I find that not being able to control others makes this friendship almost impossible to find. It brings up more questions than answers for me and I'd like to see specific examples of various scenarios to help us to actually go about finding and developing these spiritual friendships. Overall, I'd recommend this book to small groups or those interested in growing in relationship with others.

This book is a great part of our training classes, and I have found that every book suggested is the same. Thank God for some sound material to help take us to a higher level of spiritual growth (and power).

It clearly defines various spiritual relationships, and provides tools as well as case samples to show how to engage in these roles. Although the subject is detailed and nuanced, Dr. Benner's writing style makes the book easy to read.

A must-read! Completely opened my eyes to a different concept of discipleship / mentoring. A close girl friend and I read through this together as a sort of Bible study a couple of years ago and loved it - we were completely transformed! If you are seeking spiritual growth in your walk with Jesus, this is the book for you. Highly recommend reading it with someone else or with a small group.

I have no desire to become a Spiritual Director but a friend of mine, who is, gave this book to me after a conversation we had about my longing to find others interested in 'going deeper'. I do wish to help other women grow in their faith but most Bible Study groups I've been involved in don't generally move the needle. This book has been a tremendous help to me in understanding my

yearn for myself and others. I had to give the book back but not before I bought a copy for myself. I'll be reading it again.

This book challenges you to be still and listen to the direction you are being given by the Creator of your soul. The privilege of walking with others on life's journey and being a part of their discovery is such a gift. I loved the last chapter on Spiritual Accompaniment in marriage. Really spoke to my heart.

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