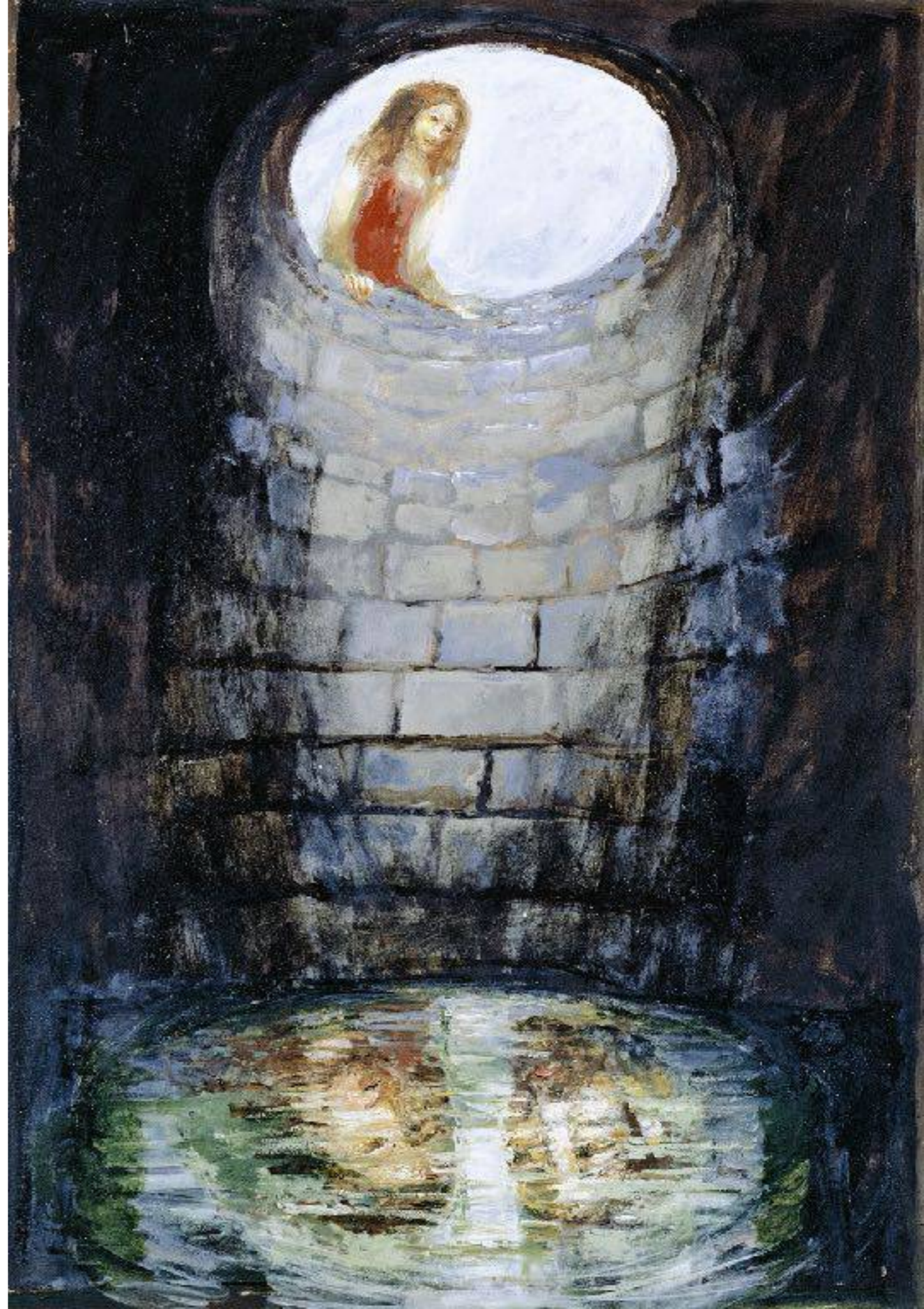


Discernment in the ministry of Spiritual Direction

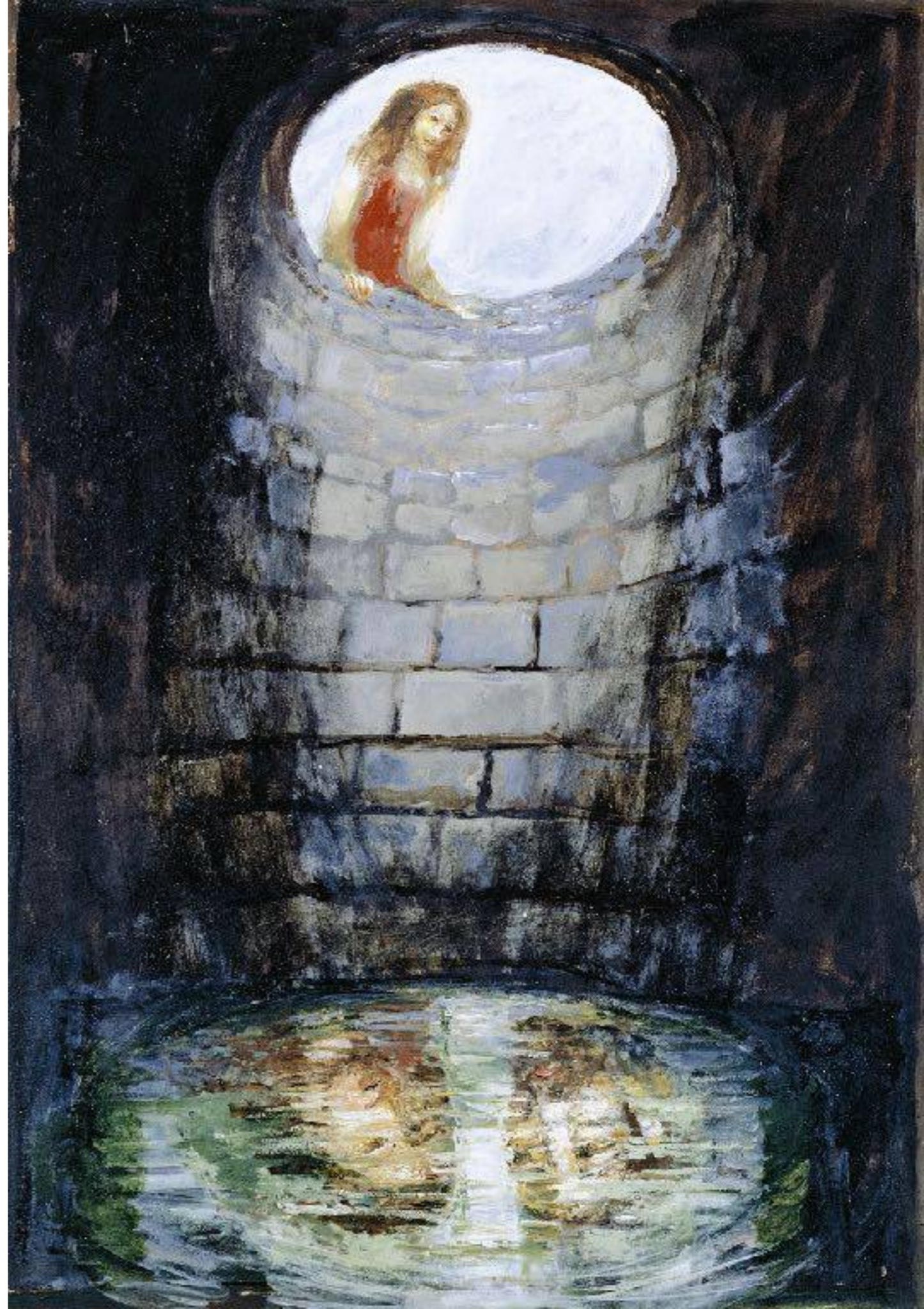
Nick Helm

www.soulspark.online

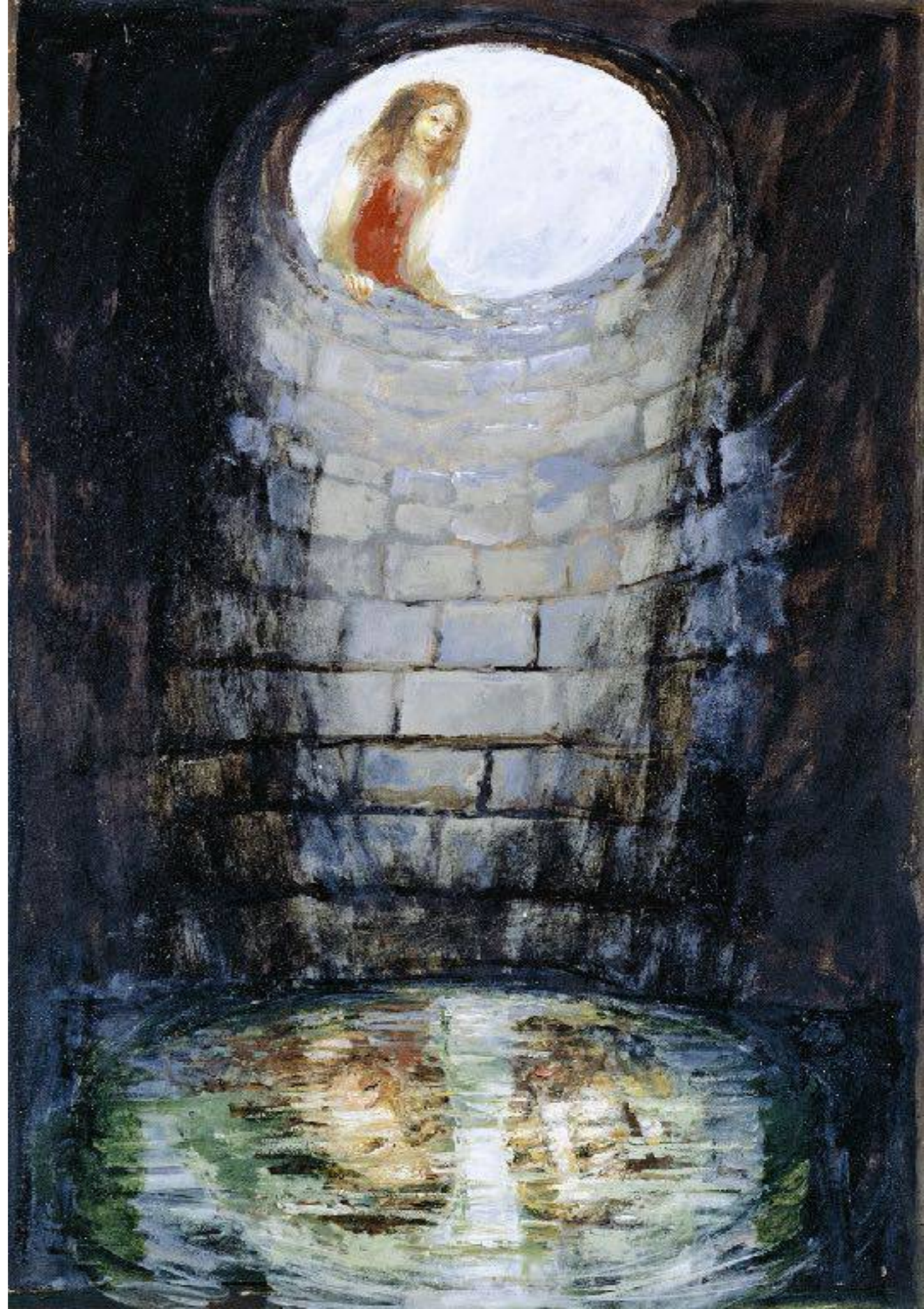


Reflecting on your experience offering Spiritual Direction

What brings you most life?
What brings you least life?



Praying
as a
Spiritual Director



Sharing
as a
Spiritual Director



Discernment

etymology: latin: discerner - to separate, perceive, distinguish

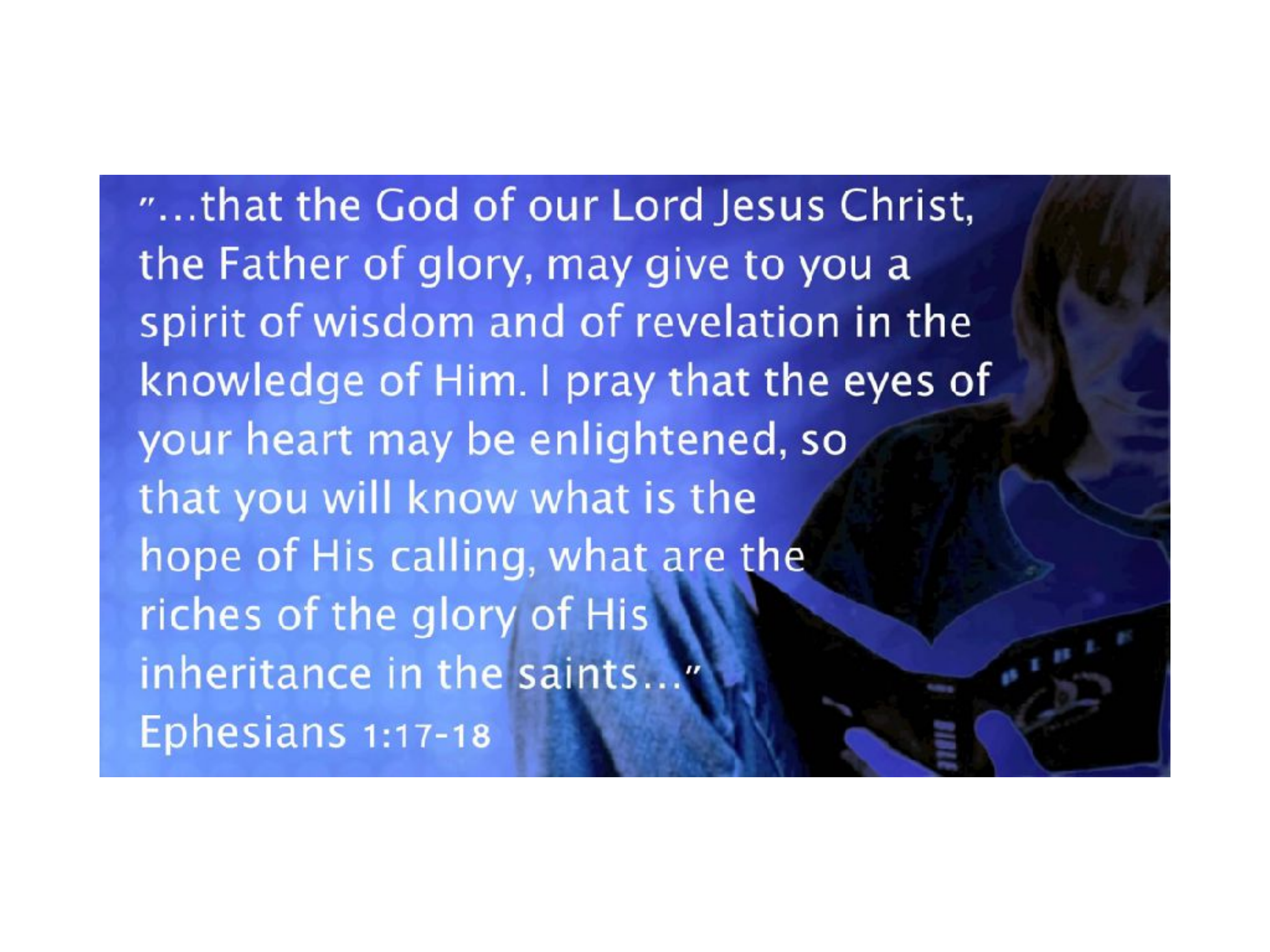
- recognition and choice (action)

Old Testament

- **connection with wisdom**
 - Deut 4: 'this will show your wisdom and discernment'
 - 1 Kings 4 'God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment and breadth of understanding'
- **choice:**
 - Moses: 'choose life'

New Testament

- Paul - a gift of Spirit 'discernment of spirits' (1 Cor)
- Gal 5 - 'flesh' and 'Spirit' - go with the Spirit
- Jesus - bring life, light...

A young boy with brown hair is shown from the chest up, looking down at an open book he is holding. He is wearing a dark-colored t-shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue. The text of the Bible verse is overlaid on the left side of the image in a white, sans-serif font.

“...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of glory, may give to you a
spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the
knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of
your heart may be enlightened, so
that you will know what is the
hope of His calling, what are the
riches of the glory of His
inheritance in the saints...”

Ephesians 1:17-18

Christian Discernment

- critical reflection involving affectivity, understanding, reason, judgement and choice into a creative partnership
- an instrument that enables us to live out Christian lives
- based upon the assumption that God approaches humans through experience

David Lonsdale, *New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Discernment)

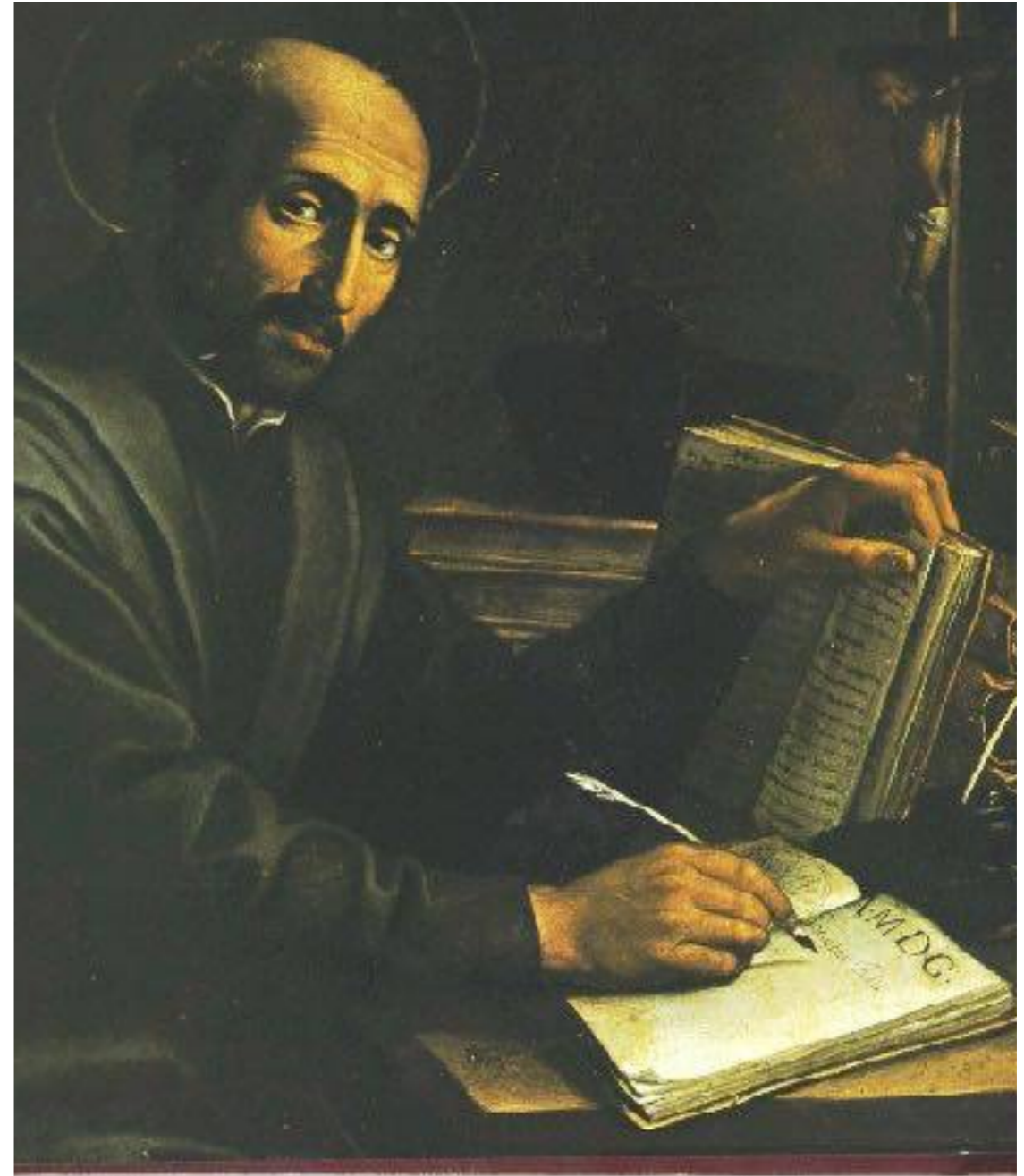
Discernment in Spiritual Direction



in your experience
in what ways does discernment occur?

Ignatian Discernment

- ❖ most influential reflection on practice of discernment
- ❖ primarily from Spiritual Exercises 'Rules for the Discernment of Spirits'
- ❖ important for Spiritual Guide to be practiced in and for the Pilgrim to grow in



Human beings are created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord and by doing so to save their soul.

The other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings, to help them in pursuit of the end for which they are created.

From this it follows that we ought to use these things to the extent that they help us towards our end, and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us.

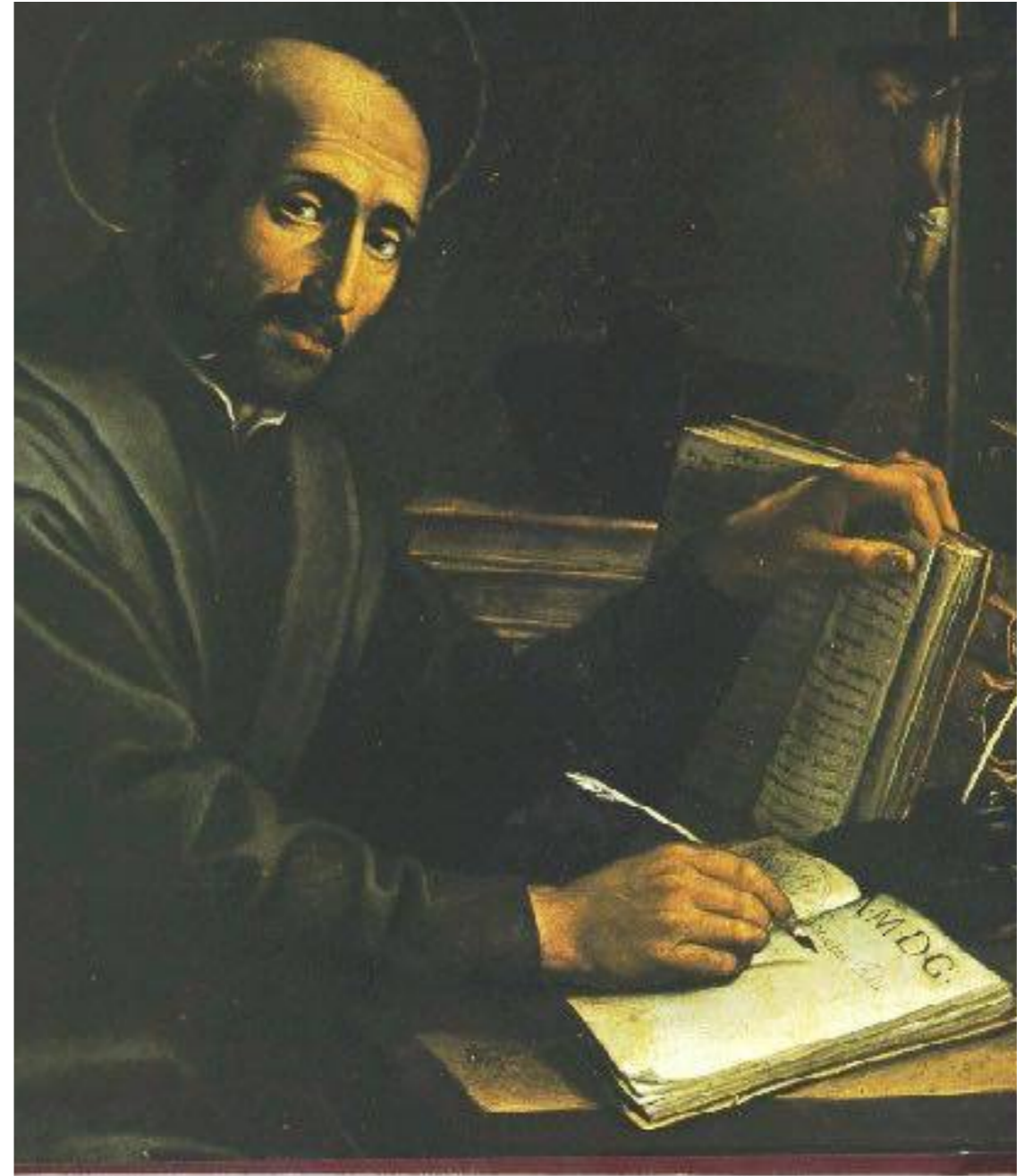
To attain this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in regard to everything that is left to our own free will and is not forbidden. Consequently, on our part we ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honour rather than dishonour, a long life rather than short one, and so in all other matters.

Rather we ought to desire and choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we are created.

The First Principle and Foundation from The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola

Ignatian Discernment

- ❖ theological perspective:
 - ❖ God can be found in all things
 - ❖ we live in tension between desire for God and desire for other 'things' - eg health, possessions, power, honour
 - ❖ human 'task' is to co-operate with God and not co-operate with that which draws us away from God



Ignatian Discernment

- ❖ seeking the 'better way'
- ❖ two stages
 - 1st week - basics
 - 2nd week - subtleties
- ❖ about recognising the underlying desire (toward God or self)
- ❖ never just an individual activity
- ❖ gift of the Spirit - product of experiencing God



Consolation - Desolation

❖ Consolation

- ◆ interior movement of love of God
- ◆ tears of remorse or compassion

I use the word 'consolation' when any interior movement is produced in the soul which leads her to become inflamed with the love of her Creator and Lord, and when as a consequence, there is no creature on the face of the earth that the person can love in itself, but they love it in the Creator and Lord of all things.

Similarly, I use the word 'consolation' when a person sheds tears which lead to the love of our Lord, whether they arise from grief over sins or over the passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other reasons immediately directed towards his service and praise.

Lastly, I give the name 'consolation' to every increase of hope, faith, and charity, to all interior happiness which calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, leaving the soul quiet and at peace in her Creator and Lord. [316]

Consolation - Desolation

- ❖ Desolation
 - ◆ contrary to consolation
 - ◆ darkness, disturbance of soul...
 - ◆ lack of confidence, without hope, love ...
 - ◆ cut off from God

'Desolation' is the name I give to everything contrary to what is described [as consolation]; for example, darkness and disturbance in the soul, attraction to what is low and of the earth, disquiet arising from various agitations and temptations. All this leads to a lack of confidence in which one feels oneself to be without hope and without love. One finds oneself thoroughly lazy, lukewarm, sad and as though cut off from one's Creator and Lord.

For just as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way, the thoughts that spring from consolation are contrary to the thoughts that spring from desolation. [317]

Consolation - Desolation

For just as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way, the thoughts that spring from consolation are contrary to the thoughts that spring from desolation.

- ❖ Thoughts from consolation are contrary to thoughts from desolation.
 - consequently a sense of connection to consolation is important to good discernment



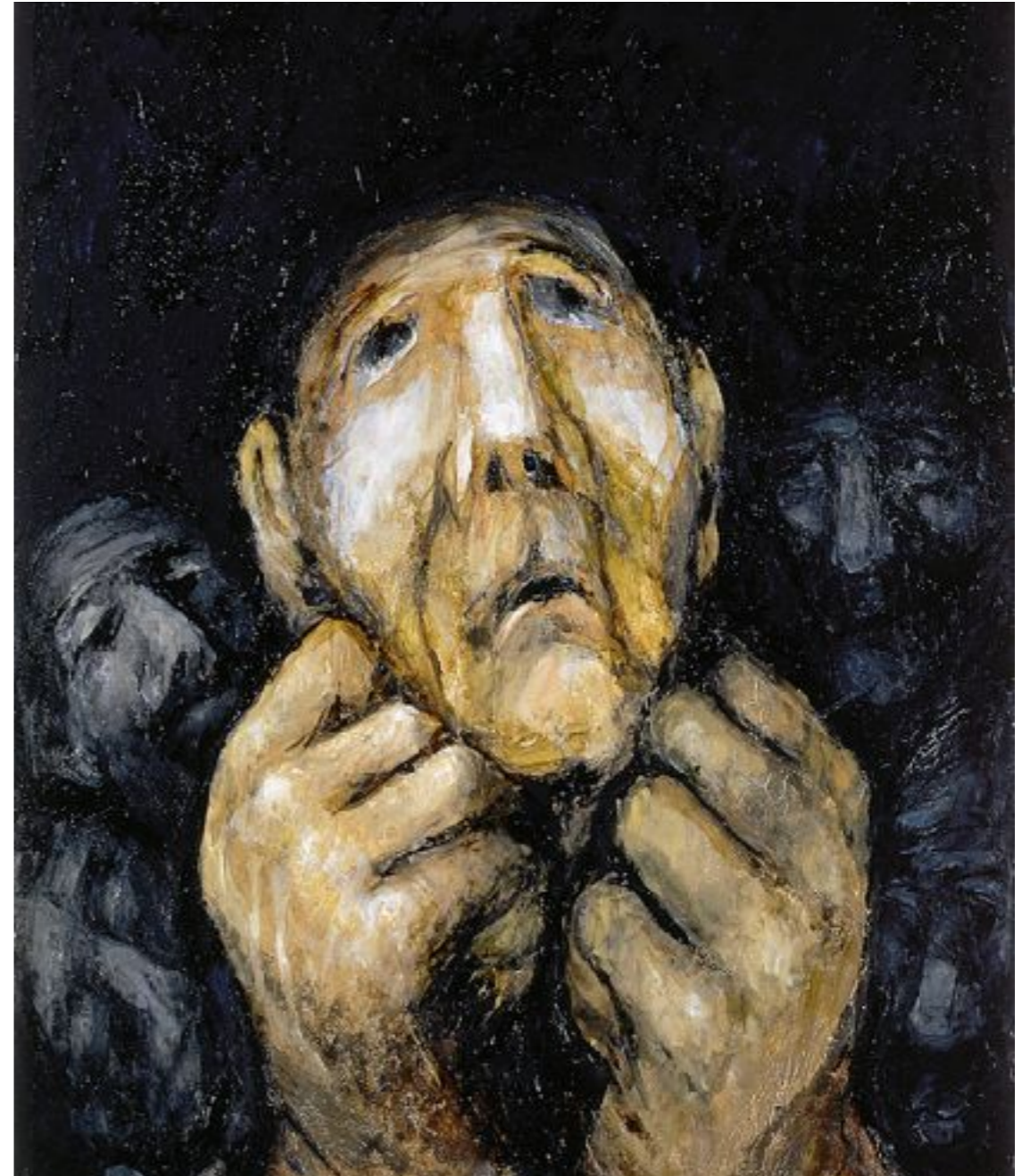
In consolation

- ❖ rejoice in feeling close to God and gather strength for future desolations
- ❖ recognise what draws you away from God - act against
 - ◆ be open about them
 - ◆ learn about yourself



In desolation

- ❖ don't make life changing decisions and don't go back on a decision made in consolation
- ❖ act gently but firmly against
- ❖ trust yourself to God's care
- ❖ Look for the cause:
 - ◆ spiritual negligence
 - ◆ God drawing you into new faith
 - ◆ God reminding of your need for grace



Deception

False Consolation

- ❖ Where what seemed consolation has led to desolation
 - ◆ wolf dressed in sheep's clothing
- ❖ watch for 'rose tinted spectacle thinking'



Praying with Discernment

The Review of the Day / Examen of Consciousness

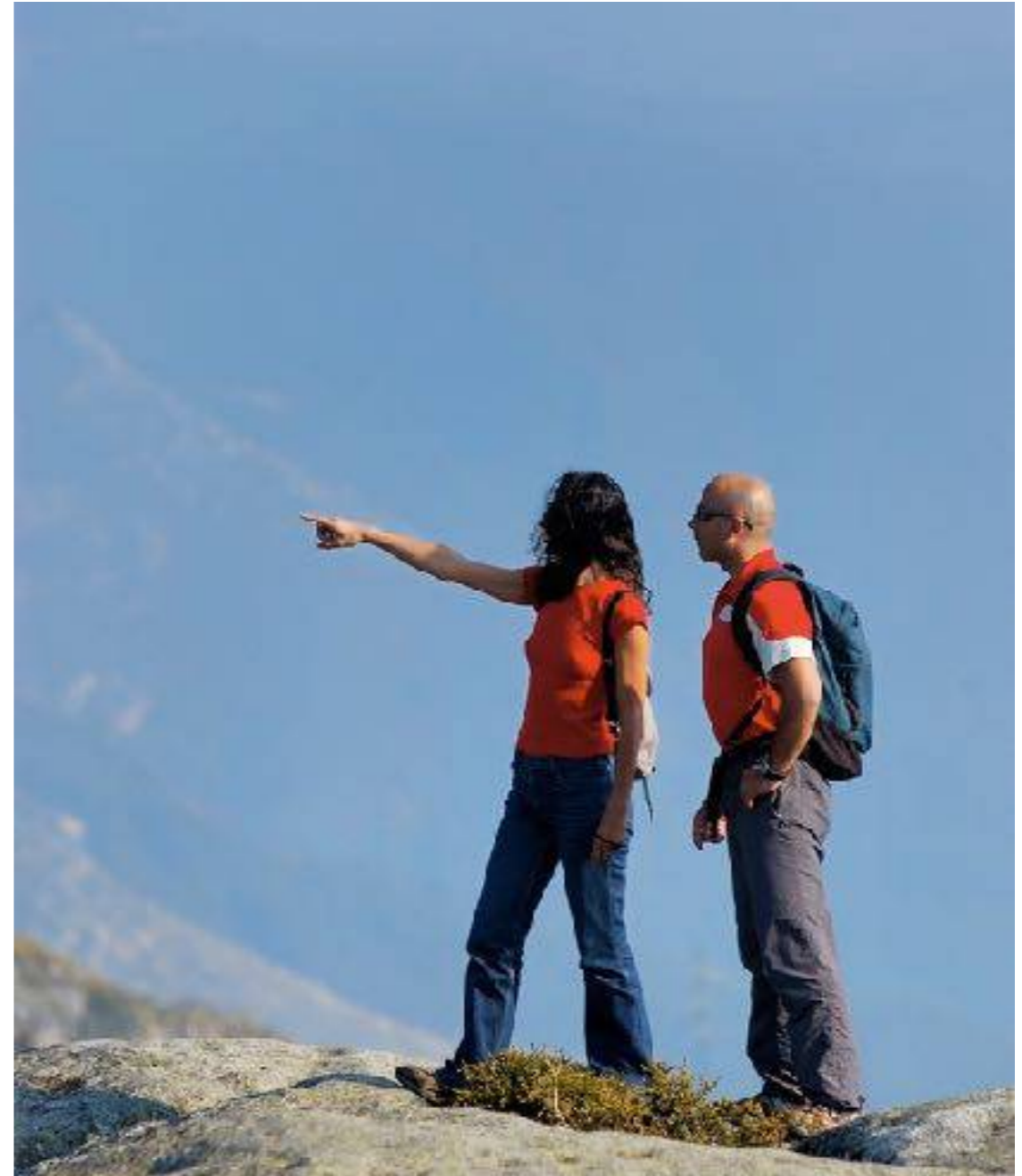
- ❖ Ask to be orientated to God's praise and glory and see from God's point of view
- ❖ Look back for life-giving moments
 - ◆ relish and give thanks
- ❖ Look back for life-draining moments
 - ◆ seek light and respond
- ❖ Look ahead and ask for Grace needed



Discernment in Spiritual Direction

Three key areas where consolation / desolation can be noticed:

- Within the director
- In the directee
- In the relationship



Reflection

- When I am listening - am I noticing consolation / desolation?
- When I respond - do I help the directee to notice consolation / desolation?



What questions are
emerging?



Discernment in Spiritual Direction

**Responding to Consolation
and Desolation**



Discernment in Spiritual Direction

- attention to feelings
- attention to underlying desire
- as a balance poised



Attention to Feelings



Stay with felt experience (don't move on, judge or rationalise - just experience them)

- can you stay with your own feelings?
- what helps you stay with a directee's felt experience?
- what hinders?

Underlying Desire

What are the feelings revealing about the underlying desire that is causing them?

- God-centred desire
- self-centred desire
- can you reflect back consolation and desolation?
- can you help the directee to recognise their own consolation and desolation?
- can you help the directee recognise the underlying desire?



As a Balance Poised



Keep returning to a balance poised; easy ...

- no pressure to any particular conclusion
- warm detachment
- allow the creator to deal with the creature
- what helps you stay 'detached'?
- how do you handle your own prejudices, anxieties, needs?

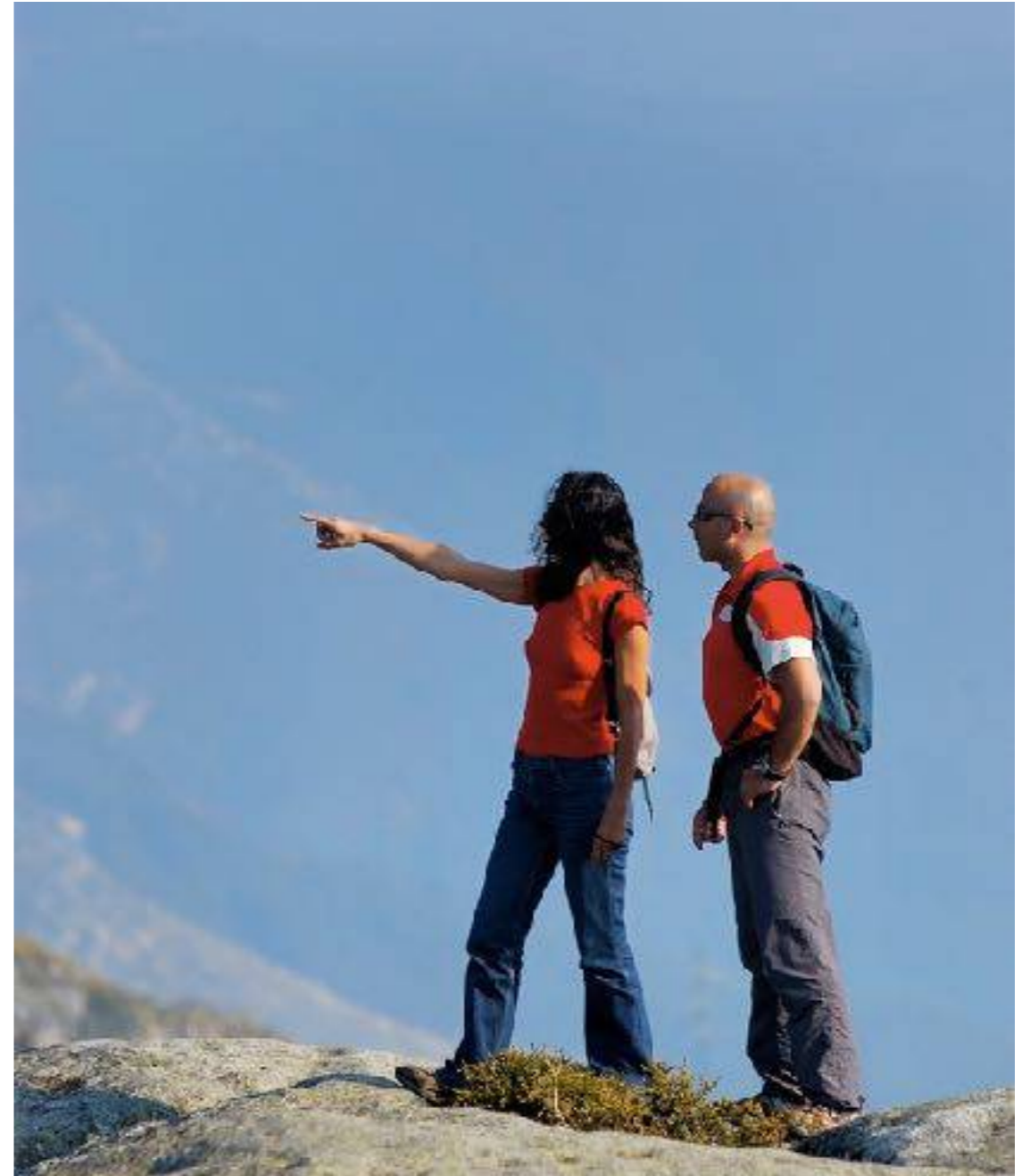
Contrary movements

When the directee seems to be feeling consolation and you are feeling desolation (or vice versa)

- listen very carefully
- reflect back
- check for small dissonances
- encourage further discernment

Recently...

- Have you noticed 'contrary movements'?
- How did you respond?
- What was the after effect?



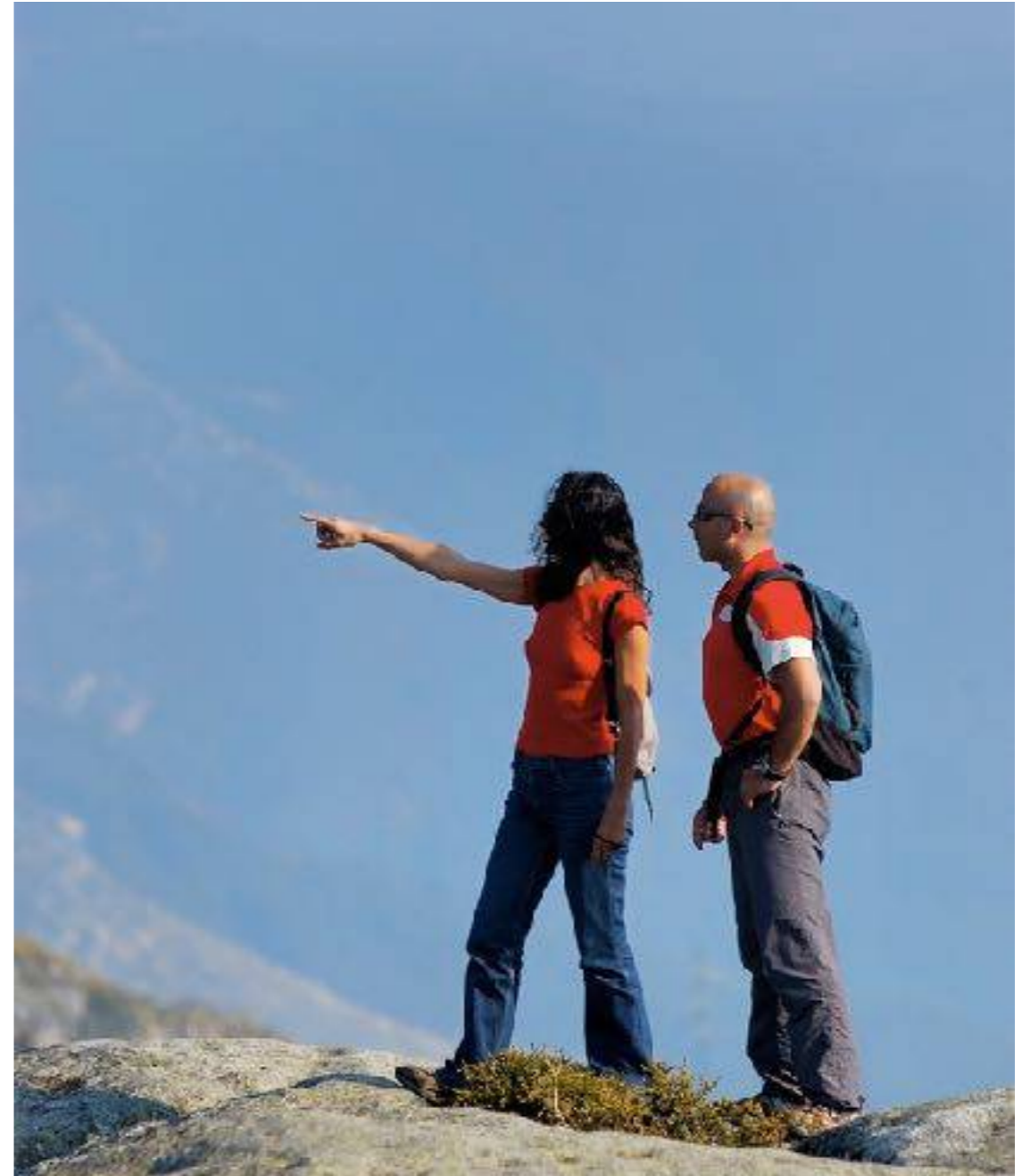
Who is discerning?

If the aim of SD is to enable a directee in their attentiveness and response to God...

...it is the directee's discernment that needs to develop

Last session:

- Who did the discerning?
- What are helpful ways of enabling the directee to do the work?



Decision Making

Foundations:

- God is for me
- Your treasure

Walls

- Spiritual Freedom
- Being Real / self-knowledge

Building Blocks

- Gathering facts



Decision Making

Process:

- State the proposition
- Pros & Cons
- Reverse the proposal
- Pros & Cons
- Weigh in the balance
- Live with provisional choice (and its alternative)
- Imagine someone asked your advice
- Imagine yourself on your deathbed

Conclusion

- Find clarity, choose, commit, act



Decision Making

Process:

- State the proposition
- Pros & Cons
- Reverse the proposal
- Pros & Cons
- Weigh in the balance
- Live with provisional choice (and its alternative)
- Imagine someone asked your advice
- Imagine yourself on your deathbed

