



Soul Sisters

CULTIVATING SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIPS





The goal of Soul Sisters is to create opportunities where it feels natural to talk about your personal walk with God.

It's a chance to minister to each other by becoming more relaxed and intentional listeners. It also gives you a chance to draw closer to God with some spiritual practices that may be new to you - silence, praying scripture, listening for what God may be saying, breath prayer and the ancient practice of Examen.

This booklet contains some basic instructions followed by eight session outlines.

Feel free to adapt them as needed.

Additional resources will be posted at baptistwomen.com/resources.

We hope that you will make deep connections with each other, so that with the apostle you can say,

"Dear friend I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well."

(3 John 1:2 NIV)

General Instructions

Invite

Invite one or more people to meet with you, explaining what is involved.

- For two people, each session will probably last about 30 minutes. For more people, expect 60-90 minutes.
- Decide when you will meet and whether you will meet in person, by phone, or online.

Organize

For two people: Use the questions as fits you best.

For three to eight people:

- Choose a facilitator. It could be the same person every week or it could rotate from week to week. The facilitator invites someone to read the question and then opens it up for people to respond. The facilitator watches the time and gently signals when it's time to move ahead.

For large groups:

- Begin the session together for part 1. Then divide up into groups of about 4-6 people each. Keep the same group divisions for all the sessions so you can develop depth over time. Let each group choose a facilitator as above.

Prepare

Download materials from baptistwomen.com or copy this booklet.

- Send each person the session outlines weekly. People like to know the questions in advance.

Prayerfully Begin

Reach out to bwoq@baptist.ca if you have questions or require other supports.



WHAT IS SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP?

Safe space

What we say in this context matters. Remember to be absolutely disciplined about not sharing anything you hear in this group outside of the group. Let us honour the vulnerability that it takes to share our souls with one another.

Grace and Compassion

We each come to this group having different backgrounds and perspectives. When we receive each other with grace and compassion we are able to learn from one another and grow.

Deep Listening

Unhurried, non-judgemental listening creates an environment that supports people and gives them space to see where God is.

What does this look like?

- We don't interrupt but instead offer the gift of our full attention.
- We don't give advice or try to fix someone's problem. Our culture has led us to think that is "helping" but in reality, our suggestions can make the person feel undermined and unheard.
- We don't evaluate (especially not to criticize or judge) but trust the Holy Spirit to do His work.

God is here

God is present with us. As we learn to listen, let us remember that we are here to bring ourselves and our sisters to Christ, and let him speak truth and life.

Session 1

WHO AM I?

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome everyone

2. Reminders

Read "Sisterhood." Ask if anyone wants to share something that stands out.

Read this paragraph on listening skills:

"Our culture does not teach us how to be good listeners. We interrupt; we pre-plan our answers while others are still talking; then once they pause, we give advice, try to fix people, perhaps even judge them." The following steps are designed to help us get beyond those habits. It won't be instant, but we will make progress.

3. Spiritual Practice - Silence

During this time don't pray or think over things—just rest with God. Sometimes we need to be quiet and slow down in order to listen well (both to God and to others). See resource "SP: Silence" to learn more.

Have 1–2 minutes of silence.

One person can check the clock or set a phone alarm on vibrate; then say Amen when time is up.

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

Share your answers to the questions for this session. For each one:

- Read the question
- Let one person answer while the others listen without comment.
- Pause: take a few deep breaths. Let what they said sink in.
- Continue until everyone has had a chance to share while the others listen, pausing after each one.

Questions for this session (share an answer to one or both):

- Share with each other the story of how you came to Christ or a significant moment in your faith journey.
- Share a favourite Bible verse. What stands out to you about it?

2. Pray together

Spiritual Practice

SILENCE/CENTERING PRAYER

Why silence?

"The invitation to solitude and silence is just that. It is an invitation to enter more deeply into the intimacy of relationship with the One who waits just outside the noise and busyness of our lives for a space within which meaningful connection can occur. It is an invitation to communication and communion with the One who is always present even when our awareness has been dulled by distraction."

- Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, P.21

"Silence means rest, rest of body and mind in which we become available for him whose heart is greater than ours. That is very threatening; it is like giving up control over our actions and thoughts, allowing something creative to happen not by us but to us. Is it so amazing that we are so often tired and exhausted, trying to be masters of ourselves, wanting to grasp the ultimate meaning of our existence, struggling with our identity? Silence is that moment in which we not only stop the discussion with others but also the inner discussions with ourselves, in which we can breathe in freely and accept our identity as a gift. "Not I live, but He lives in me." It is in this silence that the Spirit of God can pray in us and continue his creative work in us."

- Henri Nouwen, *You Are the Beloved: Daily Meditations for Spiritual Living*, P.136

One method of entering into silence is **Centering Prayer** (by Thomas Keating) -

1. Choose a sacred word or a sacred breath as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word. Thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

Session 2

WHAT IS IN MY SOUL?

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome everyone

2. Reminders

Read "Sisterhood."

As we get to know each other, the natural tendency is to talk longer. Remember to keep your answers to 2-3 minutes so each person has space to share.

3. Spiritual Practice - Silence

Pray and invite the presence of Christ. Remember He promises that where two or three are gathered in His name He will be in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20).

Then be silent for 1-2 minutes.

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

Share your answers to the questions for this session. For each one:

- Read the question
- Let one person answer while the others listen without comment.
- Pause: take a few deep breaths to let what they said have its moment.
- Continue until everyone has had a chance to share while the others listen, pausing after each one.

Questions for the session

(Take turns sharing an answer to as many questions as you have time for):

- What is in your soul? Share 1 high point and 1 low point since we last spoke.
- Where/how would you like to grow in your relationship with God?
- Describe a time in your life when you felt especially close to God.

2. Pray together

Spend some time praying for each other.

Session 3

AM I GROWING SPIRITUALLY?

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome everyone

2. Reminders

Remember to leave space after each person shares so their comments can sink in. This is a new habit, it takes time and practice for it to develop.

3. Spiritual Practice - Silence

Pray and invite the presence of Christ. Then be silent for 2-3 minutes.

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

Share your answers to the questions for this session. For each one:

- Read the question
- Let one person answer while the others listen without comment.
- Pause: Take a few deep breaths. Waiting shows we consider their thoughts valuable.
- Continue until everyone has had a chance to share while the others listen, pausing after each one. Hopefully this kind of patient listening is becoming more natural.

Questions for the session

(Take turns sharing an answer to as many questions as you have time for):

- Choose one word to describe your life since last session, and explain why.
- Where do you see spiritual fruit in your life?
- Where are the growing edges where God is inviting you to stretch?

2. Pray together

See reference - "How to pray scripture."

Choose parts of Ephesians 1:16-20 to pray for each other.

Spiritual Practice

HOW TO PRAY SCRIPTURE

Praying Scripture can broaden your prayers and it can give you confidence that you are praying the will of God.

"Praying scripture is praying God's word back to Him and allowing it to transform us. We do not need to make it happen; we do not need to do the work. God's Word will do the heavy lifting. He will do more than we know. He will take what little we give Him and do His mighty work in us."
-Carolyn Vanderheide, CBWOQ Guided Prayer Handout, P. 1.

Read a few verses (you can read a short passage as a group and then each pray based on it as you are led).

You can choose verses of praise or petition.

Here are some possibilities:

- 1 Chronicles 29:10-13
- 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17
- Philippians 1:9-11
- Colossians 1:9-13

Here is one example of how to pray Ephesians 1:16-20:

Lord, I thank you for ---. Please reveal yourself to her so that she can know you more and more deeply. Help her to have ever deeper assurance that you have called her to good things. Let her have great faith and experience your great power. Thank you that you compare the power we can have, to your power when you raised Christ from the dead. Thank you for Jesus. Amen.

Session 4

WHAT IS IN MY WAY?

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome everyone

2. Reminders

In this session we will add a step. Instead of listening completely without comment, a few people can ask questions each time. (How many people will depend on how large your group is and how much time you have.) Remember to keep your answers short so everyone has time.

Read reference: "How to ask questions."

3. Spiritual Practice - Silence

Pray and invite the presence of Christ. Are you relaxing enough to become aware of God? Spend some time in silence.

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

The first step to genuine transformation is to be aware of what is really going on inside you. As you grow in your ability to listen to others, you can also grow in self-awareness.

Share your answers to the questions for this session. For each one:

- Read the question
- Let one person answer while the others listen without comment.
- Pause: Take a few deep breaths.
- Let one or two people ask a question to expand or clarify (if they have one). Continue until everyone has had a chance to share while the others listen, pausing after each one, and asking questions.

Questions for the session

(Take turns sharing an answer to as many questions as you have time for):

- What past experiences continue to affect your spiritual life or make you overly reactive to others?
- What barriers are there in your life with God?

2. Pray together

- Pray for each other. Pray that you would experience peace and freedom.
- Perhaps you recognize places where you are hurt and angry. Pray about these too (either out loud or silently). Pray that the people involved (yes, the ones who have mistreated you) would receive as many blessings as you can think of.

Spiritual Practice

HOW TO ASK QUESTIONS TO DRAW OUT OUR SOULS

"The first service one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them.... It is God's love to us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends His ear.... Christians so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking."

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 97.

Here we are being present to God on the others behalf. As we listen, perhaps a question might arise.

Ruth Haley Barton writes, "Listening that evokes spiritually free speech in the other - asks questions that continually seek to unlock the deeper reality of the other person's experience, gently offering them permission to explore, own, and integrate their experiences into their spiritual experience."

- Ruth Haley Barton, Life Together in Christ, P.90-91

Here are some examples of questions to help guide you:

- Can you tell me more about that?
- How did you feel?
- What was the more challenging part? What was the most encouraging part?
- How would you like God to help you in this?
- How did you experience God (or not) in the midst of that experience?
- Where do you see God at work in this?
- What questions does that raise for you?

Session 5

LORD, INCREASE MY FAITH

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome everyone
2. Reminders
3. Spiritual Practice - Breath Prayer

Read reference: "Breath Prayer."

We will observe 2-4 minutes of silence. You can silently say your breath prayer at the beginning and then you can repeat it any time your mind wanders. Then I will end with a quiet "Amen."

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

Share your answers to the questions for this session. For each one follow the pattern of sharing, listening without comment, pausing, and then possibly asking a few questions.

Questions for the session

(Take turns sharing an answer to as many questions as you have time for):

- What is the strongest emotion you've felt since last session, what caused it?
- Think about the most formative spiritual experiences in your life (other than when you first met Christ). Take turns sharing one, for about 2-3 minutes each. Repeat with one or two more experiences each as time permits.

2. Pray together

Pray for each other and for God's anointing and fruitfulness.

Spiritual Practice

BREATH PRAYER

A breath prayer is a simple phrase you use to draw your focus to Christ. It is useful for when you enter a time of silence (or get distracted part way through). You can choose part of a Bible verse, or perhaps choose a few words that express your desire for this season in your life.

Over time, that phrase becomes deeply embedded so God is able to bring it to mind as you need it. Sometime later, the Holy Spirit may lead you to choose a different phrase.

Here are some examples, but feel free to create your own:

Come, Lord Jesus.

Loving Father, I trust you.

Holy Spirit, set me free from self-interest.

Session 6

I APPRECIATE YOU MY FRIEND

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome everyone

2. Reminders

3. Spiritual Practice - Silence/Breath Prayer

Pray and invite the presence of Christ. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Take about 2 minutes for silence.

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

Share your answers to the questions for this session. For each one follow the pattern of sharing, listening without comment, pausing, and then possibly asking a few questions.

Questions for the session

(Take turns sharing an answer to as many questions as you have time for):

- Share a time you saw God active in your life since last session
- Imagine your life if you never accepted Christ. How are you different from what you were 5 years ago? In what ways would you like to be different in 5 years from now?

2. Pray together

Pray from Ephesians 3:16–19 NIV for each other -

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Session 7

AIMING FOR TRANSFORMATION

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome everyone
2. Reminders
3. Spiritual Practice - Silence/Breath Prayer

Take two minutes or so to rest in the quiet presence of Christ. The Lord invites us, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10 NIV).

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

Share your answers to the questions for this session. For each one:

- Read the question
- Let one person answer while the others listen without comment.
- Pause: Take a few deep breaths. This time, be aware if a scripture comes to mind. This could be God speaking to you.
- Continue until everyone has had a chance to share while the others listen, pausing to listen for God after each one.

Questions for the session

(Take turns sharing an answer to as many questions as you have time for):

- How has God been transforming you more into his image?
- Describe a time when God seemed to be using you.
- What spiritual gifts might you have?

2. Pray together

Pray Philippians 1:9–11 NIV for each other -

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Session 8

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome everyone

The goal of all Spiritual Formation Practices is to help us become more aware of how God is working in us and around us, and then cooperate with him.

2. Reminders

Looking ahead:

- Discuss Soul Sisters 2
- Do you have some women you could gather for you to lead them in Soul Sisters 1?

3. Spiritual Practice - Examen

Read reference - Examen.

Go through the practice together. When you are finished, have people share something they noticed.

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

Reflect on Soul Sisters 1 together.

Share your answers to the questions for this session. For each one:

- Read the question
- Let one person answer while the others listen without comment.
- Pause: Take a few deep breaths. This time, be aware if a scripture comes to mind. This could be God speaking to you.
- Continue until everyone has had a chance to share while the others listen, pausing to listen for God after each one.

Questions for the session

(Take turns sharing an answer to as many questions as you have time for):

- What has God done in your life during these sessions?
- In what areas does he want you to grow next?

2. Pray together

Close by praying blessings for each other. These can include protection, peace, financial stability, God's guidance, that God would use them, etc.

Spiritual Practice

EXAMEN

1. Invite God.

Ask God to reveal himself to you. Then sit quietly.

2. Be thankful.

Recall the day and give thanks for the people and events it contained. Give a sacrifice of praise for what was difficult.

3. Notice emotions.

Pay attention to what you felt during the day.

What might God want to reveal to you through those emotions?

Ask God to help you untangle your experiences.

4. Notice God.

What were your God Moments today?

When were you aware of Him?

What do you think he was doing?

5. Bless tomorrow.

Give tomorrow to God, who is absolutely trustworthy.

Offer yourself to him in love. Rest.