

DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE



SPIRITUAL PARTNERS

A) Spiritual partners explained

What are spiritual partners?

Spiritual partners are two (or three) people committed to helping each other grow spiritually. They meet together regularly for around half an hour to support each other. There is no leader and they don't follow any curriculum, instead using agreed questions.

Why would I want a spiritual partner?

If you want to improve your fitness, having a training partner makes a big difference. Committing yourself to someone else with common goals helps you both achieve more. You spur each other on, challenge each other, hold each other accountable and keep going when it gets tough.

If you want to improve your spiritual fitness, it makes sense to have a spiritual training partner (also referred to as an accountability partner).

This concept of partnership is a Biblical principle. The Bible tells us that 'two are better than one ...' (Ecclesiastes 4:9); to '... spur one another on ... meeting together ...' (Hebrews 10:24-25); and 'as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.' (Proverbs 27:17).

The challenge is that word accountability. It's risky. Our pride and fear get in the way. Yet, it's worth it. For example, PromiseKeepers state that men committed to accountability relationships grow spiritually up to seven times faster than those involved in Sunday services only!



How do they work?

At the first meeting, the partners share their hopes and expectations for the partnership, agree a timeframe and set the content for their regular meetings. Minimally, we would expect the regular meetings to include:

1. **Personal goals:** the things they are working on that they want to be held accountable for (e.g. read my Bible more, improve my relationship with my kids, get fitter)
2. **Witness:** discussion and prayer for people you hope to see come to faith
3. **Prayer:** for each other.

People who know each other well may also choose to include a time of confession and to follow a shared Bible reading plan.

It is anticipated that the partnership will be hugely beneficial to both partners for a long time. However, circumstances change and no-one wants to feel trapped in an arrangement that isn't working. To allow an honourable exit point, the partners commit to a set period (e.g. three months), with extensions as mutually desired.

If you have a spouse, they should already be a spiritual partner. Here, we are recognising the need for an additional relationship with a trusted friend of the same gender.

Partnerships work best when the people see themselves as peers, helping each other. If you are looking to learn from someone more experienced, we would suggest you look at the separate 1-to-1 Discipleship guide.

If you like the idea of rapid personal spiritual growth, and think a spiritual partnership might be for you, turn the page to find out how ...



B) Choosing a Spiritual Partner

The first task is to find a partner. Here are some steps to help you choose.

1. Pray

Begin by asking God to reveal the person to you.

2. Search

Consider the possibilities – close friends, people in your church or work place, someone you respect, people with common interests, etc. There are at least three elements to consider:

- **Gender:** developing intimate relationships with people of the opposite sex is risky if they are not your spouse. Same gender only!
- **Trust:** accountability involves a willingness to open up and share sensitive or personal information. Character is always better than ability in the long run. Do you think you will be able to trust this person?
- **Relating:** people who relate to each can empathise and share with an understanding heart. The more things you have in common, the better (e.g. same church, same family circumstances, proximity, interests, etc.). What things do you have in common? Oh, and it will help if you like each other!

Once you think you've found someone, pray again.

3. Approach

If after praying, you still feel good about the person, approach them to explain your desire to grow spiritually, that you're looking for someone to

partner with and you'd like them to consider being that partner. If they were to agree, you'd be looking for a six-week trial.

Provide them with a copy of this guide, ask them to consider this prayerfully and arrange to meet later to discuss (over coffee or food always helps).

4. Commit

If they agreed, there's one further element required to make your partnership a success – commitment. If one of the partners misses meetings regularly, doesn't complete promises, etc. neither partner will get any benefit.

Confirm that you are both fully committed to giving this a try and move on to your first meeting ...

C) Your First Meeting

During your first meeting, you need to share expectations, agree what you are hoping to achieve, share your personal goals and confirm what questions you will ask each meeting.

The following template is provided to help you. Ensure you each have your own copy and have completed your sections in advance. The meeting is for you to learn about each other and find a way to make the partnership work.

It is almost certain that you will have different needs. The things one person is struggling with may be quite different to the things the other person wants to work on. Make sure that the goals you set for yourself are specific and relevant to you (i.e. your goals may be quite different to each others).



Spiritual Partners Commitment

ABOUT ME *(Complete prior to the meeting)*

NAME:

PURPOSE: Through this partnership, I am hoping to:

GOALS: The goals that I would like support with are (consider spiritual, relational and physical goals):

My goals	How I'll achieve the goal	How my partner can help

WITNESS: Three people I wish to see come to faith are:

ABOUT MY PARTNER *(Complete during the meeting)*

NAME:

PURPOSE: Through this partnership, they are hoping to:

GOALS: The goals my partner would like support with are:

Partner's goals	How they'll achieve the goal	How I can help

WITNESS: Three people they wish to see come to faith are:

(Complete during the meeting)

We will meet together ...

Where (e.g. at Church, café, out walking):

When (day, time, how long and how often):

We will **review** this partnership on: (date)

In addition, we will also: (tick any that apply)

- Pray for each other between meetings
- Contact each other between meetings
- Include a time of confession
- Follow a shared Bible reading plan that we discuss each meeting
- Other:

We will not share anything discussed together with anyone else (unless explicit permission is granted).

We will make meeting together a priority – for our mutual benefit.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

D) Your Regular Meetings

You may find it useful to agree some standard questions that you ask at each meeting. Here is a potential outline (but we encourage you to adapt it to suit your purposes):

1. Starting	How has God blessed you this week (what went right?) What have you been most concerned about this week (what went wrong)?
2. Goals	Questions about your goals, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual life: How is your relationship with God? Did you spend appropriate time with God this week? Did you pray for your non-Christian friends? What is God teaching you and how are you responding? Did you pray for each other? • Home life: How is it going with your spouse? How is it going with your kids? Did you invest the proper quality/quantity of time in your most important relationships? • Work life: How are things going at work? • Others: you could also ask questions about helping others, ministry in your church, sin to confess, temptation, etc.
3. Witness	Discuss the people on your list that you would like to see come to faith. For each person, ask 'what is the next step' (e.g. doing something socially; identifying and meeting needs; sharing your faith; inviting them to something or to meet someone)? Commit to actions. Pray specific scripture verses over them, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They will 'confess their sins to God' (1 John 1:9) • They will 'acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God' (1 John 4:15) • 'God will draw them to himself' (John 6:44) • 'God will open doors for you to share the gospel clearly' (Colossians 4:3-4)
4. Prayer	Close your time with prayer for each other – in particular your concerns and goals.

E) What else?

Be patient. Developing an accountability friendship takes time and intentional effort. Relationships typically progress through a few phases.

If you're starting out, your focus will need to be on getting to know each other better and building trust. Consider heading out socially and meeting each other's families. Perhaps work on a project together. Make sure you pray for and with one another.

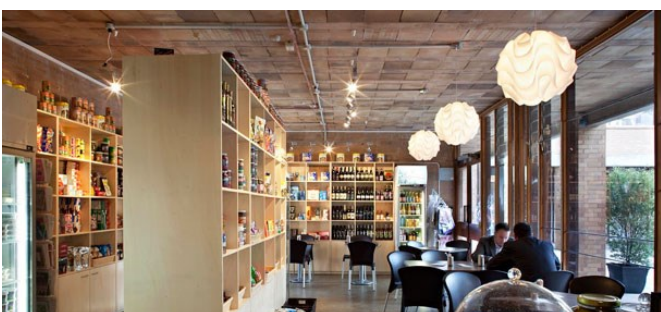
The paradox of relationships is that they deepen as you put effort into the other person. If you want

someone to be interested in you, it must start by you showing interest in them. Ask lots of questions and remember their answers! If your partner says they're worried about a situation, pray about it, and next time you see them, ask them about it.

As you prove you are interested in each other, your relationship develops trust. As your trust develops, you each share more deeply and allow accountability.

That's when growth happens.

For more information, please contact the Mission Team (missionteam@salvationarmy.org.nz).



Going Deeper

- Life Transformation Groups (LTG): an intensive system for developing spiritual partnerships. Includes explicit confession questions and shared Bible reading plans.
- Promise Keepers 4x4 small groups: guidelines and studies for men's accountability groups, including a great set of questions (http://www.promisekeepers.org.nz/MSG_questions.html).