



In the Catholic tradition, the **spiritual director** has for centuries been a key figure in inner growth. Saints, religious men and women, committed laypeople, and even popes have sought guidance from a priest or experienced guide who could help them discern God's will in their lives.

But today's reality presents a new challenge: **many sincere Catholics desire to grow spiritually and do not have a spiritual director**. A shortage of priests, overloaded schedules, scattered communities, or simply not finding the right person are increasingly common situations.

Does this mean that the spiritual path becomes blocked?

Not at all.

The Catholic tradition—rich, deep, and surprisingly practical—offers many ways to **advance with security, maturity, and fidelity to God even when a stable spiritual director is not available**.

This article aims to be a pastoral and theological guide to walking forward with confidence, avoiding common mistakes, and drawing from the spiritual treasures the Church has handed down through the centuries.

1. The Spiritual Director in the Christian Tradition

Before addressing what to do without a spiritual director, it is helpful to understand **why the Church has always valued this guidance so highly**.

From the earliest centuries of Christianity, especially in the monastic movement of the desert, believers sought an **“abba” or spiritual father**. This person was not a substitute for God, but someone with experience who helped in discernment.

Great saints practiced spiritual guidance:

- Saint Teresa of Ávila



- Saint John of the Cross
- Saint Ignatius of Loyola
- Saint Francis de Sales

Spiritual direction mainly helps in three areas:

1. **Discerning God's will**
2. **Avoiding spiritual deception**
3. **Growing in an orderly interior life**

Christian spirituality begins with an important truth:

| *No one is a completely good judge of themselves.*

For this reason, external guidance has traditionally been recommended.

However, the Church also recognizes that **it is not always possible to have such guidance.**

2. A Forgotten Truth: The True Director Is the Holy Spirit

When a human guide is absent, it is important to remember a fundamental truth: **the primary spiritual director is always God Himself.**

Jesus promised His disciples:

| *“The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have told you.**”*



| *(John 14:26)*

This means that the Christian is never completely alone.

God acts through:

- Scripture
- the Church
- the sacraments
- a well-formed conscience
- spiritual tradition

The human spiritual director is an **instrument**, not the source of grace.

Therefore, when that instrument is lacking, **God continues to guide the path.**

3. The Dangers of Walking Without Guidance

Although it is possible to advance without a spiritual director, it is important to recognize the risks.

Spiritual tradition warns of several dangers.

1. Self-deception

It is easy to justify spiritual decisions that actually arise from pride, fear, or comfort.

2. Spiritual activism

Multiplying religious practices without order or depth.

3. Scrupulosity

Confusing perfectionism with holiness.



4. Spiritual trends and fashions

The internet is full of fragmented or poorly interpreted spiritualities.

Therefore, the goal is not to replace a spiritual director with **personal opinions**, but with **solid criteria rooted in Christian tradition**.

4. The First Piece of Advice: Build a Simple and Stable Spiritual Life

When direct guidance is absent, the key is **spiritual stability**.

Many saints insisted on this principle: **few practices, but practiced faithfully**.

A solid spiritual life usually includes:

Daily prayer

It does not need to be complicated.

For example:

- 10–15 minutes of mental prayer
- reading the Gospel of the day
- a simple conversation with God

Frequent participation in the Eucharist

The Mass is the center of Christian life.

Even when spiritual direction is absent, **the Eucharist forms the believer interiorly**.

Regular confession

Although it is not spiritual direction, the sacrament of reconciliation **helps orient the soul**.



Many priests offer brief advice that can be very valuable.

5. Learn from the Spiritual Masters of the Church

If you do not have a living spiritual director, the Church offers **spiritual directors in written form**.

The saints left works that continue guiding millions of Christians.

Some accessible classics include:

Saint Francis de Sales

- *Introduction to the Devout Life*

It is one of the best manuals for laypeople.

Saint Teresa of Ávila

- *The Way of Perfection*

A deep exploration of prayer.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola

- *Spiritual Exercises*

Essential for discernment.

Saint John of the Cross

- Writings on the purification of the soul.

Reading the saints is, in a certain sense, **having spiritual directors tested by history**.



6. Learn to Practice Christian Discernment

Discernment is the art of **recognizing what comes from God and what does not.**

Without a spiritual director, this skill becomes especially important.

Some key questions that help:

- 1. Does this decision bring me closer to God, or only satisfy my desires?**
- 2. Does it produce deep peace or only temporary excitement?**
- 3. Is it in harmony with the teaching of the Church?**

God often guides through:

- interior peace
- coherence with the Gospel
- the fruits of charity

Saint Paul expresses it this way:

*“The fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**”*

(Galatians 5:22-23)

When a decision produces these fruits, it is usually a good sign.



7. Seek Advice Even If It Is Not Formal Spiritual Direction

Not having a spiritual director does not mean **isolating yourself**.

It is wise to seek occasional advice from:

- a trusted priest
- a religious brother or sister
- an experienced catechist
- a mature Christian layperson

Christian tradition has always valued **the wisdom of the community**.

The Book of Proverbs reminds us clearly:

*“Where there is no counsel, the people fall;
but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.”
(Proverbs 11:14)*

Sometimes a brief conversation can bring great clarity.

8. Maintain Healthy Spiritual Humility

One of the risks in the spiritual life is thinking that one has already progressed very far.

Without a spiritual director, humility becomes even more important.

Some signs of spiritual humility include:

- accepting correction
- recognizing mistakes



- not seeking extraordinary experiences
- valuing ordinary faithfulness

Holiness, in the Catholic tradition, **does not consist in mystical phenomena**, but in loving God and neighbor faithfully.

9. Avoid Obsession with Spiritual Experiences

In today's world there is a strong search for **intense experiences**.

But the great spiritual masters warn against this.

Saint John of the Cross taught that **religious emotions are not the measure of holiness**.

Authentic spiritual growth is usually:

- slow
- quiet
- persevering

Very often God guides precisely **through faithfulness in small things**.

10. Use Today's Spiritual Resources Wisely

We live in a paradoxical age.

Personal spiritual direction may be scarce, but there are **more spiritual resources available than ever before**.

Among them:

- the Bible accessible in many formats
- online homilies



- theology courses
- digitized classical spiritual books
- spiritual retreats

However, discernment is necessary.

Not everything circulating on the internet is theologically sound.

A good criterion is to seek **sources faithful to the teaching authority of the Church.**

11. Remember That Holiness Is Possible in Ordinary Life

One idea that sometimes discourages people is the belief that without spiritual direction it is impossible to advance seriously.

The history of the Church shows the opposite.

Many saints grew spiritually in very simple circumstances.

The key is not perfect conditions, but **faithfulness of heart.**

Jesus Himself taught this:

“Whoever is faithful in little is also faithful in much.”
(Luke 16:10)

Holiness is built through:

- small daily decisions
- love for one’s neighbor
- patience in difficulties
- perseverance in prayer



12. Trust in God's Pedagogy

God knows how to guide each person in a unique way.

Sometimes He allows the absence of certain human helps in order to **strengthen the direct relationship with Him**.

Many believers discover that during such periods their faith becomes more:

- personal
- conscious
- profound

The spiritual path never depends solely on human means.

Above all, it depends on grace.

Conclusion: Walking with Confidence

Not having a spiritual director may seem like a disadvantage.

But it is not an insurmountable obstacle.

The Church offers many secure paths:

- Scripture
- the sacraments
- spiritual tradition
- prudent counsel
- persevering prayer

Above all, the Christian walks accompanied by God Himself.



As the psalm reminds us:

“*The Lord is my shepherd; **I shall not want.***”
(Psalm 23:1)

With humility, faithfulness, and trust, the believer can advance firmly in the spiritual life, even when the path seems more solitary.

Because in truth, **whoever sincerely seeks God never walks alone.**