

# CASES FOR WORKSHOP IN OSLO

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**Mary** is an ordained minister, 50 years old, twice divorced, who has had a rather successful life as a pastor and administrator. However, she has also had a string of tempestuous relationships with men with whom she has gotten close only to find them in some way rejecting. In the course of therapy she recovered the memory that she was raped as a four-year old by a neighbor and felt she was going to die. She has been seeing you for spiritual direction. Often she has had experiences of God caring for her and tenderly holding her, but whenever she goes near the experience of the rape, she recoils because she begins to feel terror again and then anger at God for allowing this to happen to her. She cannot go near the anger because God was the one who brought her through some of her blackest moments. You have gently suggested that she might have to express the anger to God, but she resolutely refuses to go there. She continues in therapy which she finds very helpful, but also very difficult and harrowing at times.

1. *How do you feel as you read this case?*
2. *Would you want to be her spiritual director? Why do you answer this way?*
3. *What faith issues does the case bring up for you?*
4. *How would you proceed?*

**Jane**, age 25, is a graduate student in theology who also volunteers at a hospice for AIDS patients. She comes to you for spiritual direction because she is new to this area and has heard about you from colleagues. She prays regularly, using a devotional books, and is often distracted in prayer. She worries a lot about morality, regularly feeling that she is so deeply sinful that God could not love her. She wants to pray better and envies others who seem to have wonderful experiences of God. You have seen her 5-6 times, and gradually she has become relaxed and has felt a strong desire for God. She was very moved by Isaiah 43 and the words, "You are precious in my eyes and I love you." You thought that she might enjoy Psalm 139 and suggested that she use the beginning verses for prayer. When she read the words, "O Lord, you have searched me and known me... you discern my thoughts from afar," she became frightened and angry and gave up praying. She has reluctantly returned to see you for direction. As you talk about what happened, it comes out that her parents were abusive and intrusive when she was a child. She never seemed able to please them, and they wanted to know everything she did or thought. (*Same questions as in first case*)

**Mark** is a banker, aged 45, with a wife and two children. He is active in his church and prays regularly. Recently his bank lost large sums of their customers' money through the embezzlement of an employee who was one of Mark's good friends. Mark is very angry at him. In fact he has had fantasies of having the man killed. He is especially upset because he had been like a mentor to the man and had introduced him to some of the bank's clients from whom he stole. These customers can ill afford to lose so much money. They will get some back from insurance, but still they lost a lot of money, and the bank suffered a great loss of reputation. One day Mark begins to pray and finds himself on a cross beside Jesus who is looking down at the crowd who are jeering at him. Among the crowd is the embezzler. As Jesus starts to say, "Father, forgive..." Mark shouts at him to stop, telling Jesus that forgiveness is useless; these people only want him to suffer and die. He is horrified and stops praying. Now he comes to see you for spiritual direction and tells you the story. (*Same questions*)

**Julia** is a 50 year old divorcee with three grown children and some young grandchildren. She came to see you for spiritual direction because she has questions about some church teaching about God. These questions, you found, were rather profound ones that anyone who takes God seriously might have. But the real issue turned out to be her desire for a closer relationship with God. She has been seeking help for her prayer life for some time. She has read a number of books, attended a number of retreats, tried various techniques, but is still not satisfied. You agree to see her and explain that spiritual direction will entail talking about what happens when she tries to be in contact with God. She seems relieved and agrees to see you once a month. It turns out that she has had some profound experiences of God that drew her to want more in the relationship. It also turns out that she never felt deeply loved by her parents or by her former husband. She sought therapy to come to terms with these losses. In the course of the first several months you discover that she tends to see God as One who makes demands, not as One who invites closeness. Gradually, however, she gets in touch with a very deep desire for God's presence and love. You encourage her to express this desire to God. Today she comes in looking quite sad. She has been asking God for healing and forgiveness, using some of the healing stories in the gospels. But she still feels empty and apart from God. She describes the yearning as a deep pain. You ask her to give you some example of what happens. She tells you that she was in a church recently and looked at a stained glass window depicting Christ in heaven with saints and angels. As she looked at it, she noticed the dark bars (the ones that hold the glass together) and started to cry. She felt that she was barred from God's presence and begged Jesus, with tears, "What do you want me to do?" There was no answer. She left the church feeling very down. (*Same questions*)

**Maude** is a 55 year old Sister of Notre Dame who has been seeing you for spiritual direction for five years and has also made four directed retreats with you over that span. She has a well-developed friendship with Jesus and wants to follow him and live his values in her work and in her community. One day, while praying, she feels very close to Jesus as she contemplates the scenes in Mark's gospel where the disciples keep missing the meaning of what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah. It seems that Jesus knows their limitations and still likes them even when they can't seem to understand what he is going through. She thinks with some amusement and warmth of her friends and tells Jesus that she wants to love her friends and those she meets as Jesus does. The next day she returns to these scenes, but this time the quarreling among the disciples about who is the greatest catches her attention. She feels angry at them and sorry for Jesus. Her own friends come to mind. This time, however, she feels some resentment toward them. She always seems to be the one who takes the initiative to get together. She engages in a number of imaginary conversations with her friends in which she expresses her resentment. She thinks that if she volunteered for the missions, none of them would ever contact her. She churns with various emotions and thoughts. "Jesus didn't get much from his friends either. What more should she expect?" "If I keep initiating everything, maybe I'm not treating them as equals." Then she realizes that she had asked to love her friends as Jesus did and says to herself, "Jesus died alone and friendless; That's what God wants of me. I accept it." As she tells you about her prayer, you sense strong anger in her. You ask her if she talked over her feelings with Jesus, and she realizes that she didn't, that she was talking with herself. As you continue the conversation, she recalls that she felt anger that God seemed to be asking so much from Jesus. (*Same questions*)