



3~Hour Retreat

A guide to help you spend time with God

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*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."
Matthew 11:28*

Overview

Finding time to get away and be with God alone, even for a few hours, is challenging. We live in a fast-paced society that puts little value on slowing down and carving out time for the soul. Even for the most committed believer, our souls can become one of the most neglected parts of our lives. When was the last time you felt rested ... REALLY rested and refreshed – was it a week ago, a month, longer or can't you even remember? Three hours with God is more than a splash of cool water on your face as you run through life, more than a quick verse and a hurried prayer as you grab a bite and run to the car. A time of retreat can be water for your soul in dry, parched land.

“A personal retreat allows us room to be honest with God about how imperfect we are, how disillusioned we are about life and our inability to live holy and wholly this side of heaven.”¹

This ½ day retreat is an invitation to step out of the chaos of life for a few hours and into a time for only you and God. If you're like most of us, it may not be easy the first time or maybe even the second or third, but if you press on and make retreating a consistent part of your spiritual journey, you will not be left unchanged.

“ ... In spending a [retreat] day like this, it is our mental habits that make things somewhat hard. Our minds are accustomed to solve, explain and produce things. So now when these are the very things that are not needed we may feel disoriented. This is quite normal. We want to get out of the driver's seat. Most of us, I am afraid, are so well practiced in driving that it is difficult for us to quit. You are not alone; we are all in the same boat. But remember: we want to give this time to God. We want to give more space to God. This is why you are authorized to not produce, explain or solve anything today - actually, this is your assignment! This may feel freeing sometimes, but at other times it may also feel as a punishment. Never mind. He is awake, able to speak His mind, fully able to direct and act exactly the way He wants to. So we are not in a vacuum even if it feels like it.”²

¹ Jane Ruvietta, *Resting Place*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005)

² Endre Kovacs, *An Exploration into the Country of Prayer*, (*Imago Christi*, 2005)

A Guide for Your Time with God

Where should I go?

Choosing a location is an important aspect of your retreat. It's best to be somewhere that is quiet and restful. Choose a place that is comfortable and isn't filled with opportunities to "do something". Getting outside of your own home is a good choice so you won't be tempted to answer the phone or check your email. If the weather is pleasant, go outside! Local parks, gardens or retreat centers are always a good choice.

What to bring ... What to leave

Bring ...

Bible

Journal/Pen

A water bottle or snack

A blanket to sit/lay on

Leave ...

Cell phone (at least leave it in your bag/car)

Books to read

Computer

Music

What can I include in my day?

Reading Scripture:

Try the practice of *Lectio Divina* in which you take small, bite-sized portions of scripture and meditate on them. *Lectio divina* is Latin for "divine reading" and has been a part of church life for centuries. It is a structure of prayer that uses Scripture and silence to invite God's presence and direction into our lives. By really listening to the Scripture as you read it slowly and deliberately, and letting it soak in during a time of silence, you learn to tune your heart to the "gentle whisper" of God (I Kings 19:12). *Lectio divina* is much like tuning the radio to your favorite station and singing the song you hear the rest of the day.

Quiet Reflection:

We live in a noisy, hectic world. Learning to sit ... just sit and be still is very hard for many of us but it does get easier with practice.

Journaling:

While the practice of journaling comes more easily for some, there is certainly value in capturing aspects of your journey with God. When we are discouraged it can be very encouraging to look back and see how God has been faithful. We are a forgetful people. That is why we are commanded all through scripture to "remember".

Taking a walk:

Walk slowly and linger when something catches your eye. Look, really look, at what is around you in creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." Psalm 19:1.

Suggested Schedule – 3 Hour Retreat

Remember – getting away to be with God alone won't always be easy. Try following the suggested schedule and the timeframes mentioned below, even if it's a bit stretching. Be patient with yourself.

Preparation – 30 minutes

- When you arrive at your retreat location begin to move slowly. As we begin to slow our body down, our heart rate follows as does our breathing as we create space for God to enter. A retreat is an opportunity to walk slowly, breathe deeply and cease striving.
- Find a place where you will spend at least the first hour of your time and get comfortable.
- Sit quietly and just look around. We move so fast through life that we seldom notice what is around us. Resting isn't only about *not doing*, it is an internal state of our soul.
 - Who or what is around you?
 - What are the sounds, the smells?
 - Do you like them or dislike them? What do they remind you of?
 - How do you feel right now?

Silence – 30 minutes

- Take several deep, deep breaths and then exhale as much as you can – more than you usually do.
- Begin by expressing your intention to God to spend this time in His presence.
- Talk to God and ask Him to help you let go of what you carried into your day. It's impossible to come to your time with God with a completely uncluttered mind!
- Ask yourself: "How am I really feeling? Lighthearted? Heavy-hearted? At peace? Distracted? Worried? Angry? Afraid? Hopeful? Numb?" Scared or burdened in another way? Name the things that are on your mind that you want to set aside for the day. Ask God to "hold" them for the day.
- Continue to take a few more deep breaths as you quiet yourself. Don't rush yourself!
- When you feel ready, move on to scripture reading.

Scripture Reading – 30 minutes

Read Psalm 139:1-12 in the Message translation using the practice of Lectio Divina described below. ³

Read the Word: Read a Scripture passage slowly out loud, lingering over the words so that they resonate in your heart. Let it sink in. When a word or phrase catches your attention, don't keep reading. Stop and attend to what God is saying to you. Be open to the Word. Don't analyze it or judge it. Listen and wait.

Psalm 139: 1-12

GOD, investigate my life; get all the facts firsthand.
 I'm an open book to you;
 even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.
 You know when I leave and when I get back;
 I'm never out of your sight.
 You know everything I'm going to say
 before I start the first sentence.
 I look behind me and you're there,
 then up ahead and you're there, too—
 your reassuring presence, coming and going.
 This is too much, too wonderful—
 I can't take it all in!
 Is there any place I can go to avoid your Spirit?
 to be out of your sight?
 If I climb to the sky, you're there!
 If I go underground, you're there!
 If I flew on morning's wings
 to the far western horizon,
 You'd find me in a minute—
 you're already there waiting!
 Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark!
 At night I'm immersed in the light!"
 It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;
 night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.

Meditate: Read the Scripture again, this time out loud. Listen for any invitation that God is extending to you in this Word. Reflect on the importance of the words that light up to you. Like Mary, who pondered the Word in her heart, gently explore the ramifications of God's invitation.

Verbal Response: Read the Scripture a third time. Now is the moment to enter into a personal dialogue with God. There is no right or wrong way to do this. The important thing is to respond truthfully and authentically. What thoughts or feelings has the text aroused in you? Identify where you are resistant or want to push back. Become aware of where you feel invited into a deeper way of being with God. Talk to God about these feelings.

³ Visit the Imago Christi website (www.ImagoChristi.org) for more on the spiritual practice of *Lectio Divina*.

Rest: Rest and wait in the presence of God. Allow some time for the Word to sink deeply into your soul. Yield and surrender yourself to God.

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

Walking – 30 minutes

Take a walk. Move slowly, saunter, pay attention to what is around you.

- Look up, look down
- Sing
- Pray
- Enjoy creation!

Journaling – 30 minutes

Spend time journaling, using one of the starters below, if needed:

- How did you hear God or sense Him speaking to you during your Scripture reading?
- Where did you see God in creation during your walk?
- What emotions are you feeling?
- Respond to: “My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.” Psalm 62:1
- God, this day has been ...
- I feel ...

Ending Your Day – 30 minutes

Take 30 minutes at the end of your time and invite the Holy Spirit to revisit your day with you. Ponder (perhaps even journal) these questions:

- When or how did you sense God's presence?
- When was it that you (knew that you) were really resting?
- What was hard for you? Easy?
- What will you take with you as you leave?

You did it!

Enter back into your day slowly savor your day with God.

Review and Repeat

In the days that follow, take some time to review your retreat day.

- What experiences stand out from your retreat?
- What do you notice different about yourself in the days since your retreat?
- What type of new desires has your retreat experience awakened in you?
- What would a pattern of such retreats look like for you? Once a month, once a quarter?
- Notice what starts happening to your own personal prayer life as a result of your retreat times.
- Find someone to share your retreat experiences with.