STSAMINISTRIES.ORG

A PERSONAL RETREAT GUIDE

WHY TAKE A PERSONAL RETREAT?

Christians need space, time and solitude to reflect on God's activity in their life, and to reconnect with God in meaningful ways. Just as Jesus retreated to the hills to reflect and be alone with God, His followers can seek out a place and time to draw closer to God, be it at home or at a retreat center. Sister Katherine Hermes says "Don't go on a retreat with any expectations. Don't give God any demands or ultimatums. Just say, 'Here I am, Lord'. Don't take a lot of books to read. Give God some time to talk."

DOES ONE SIZE FIT ALL?

There are many different ways to organize a time of retreat. This Personal Retreat Guide contains some ideas to help you get started. Don't expect to use all of them on a given retreat. In our go-go world there is a tendency to try to cover "a lot of ground," rather than take time to reflect and pray about whatever "ground" we are on at the moment. Whatever plan you choose to follow is not as important as being sure to allow lots of time for meditation and prayer. "Less is more" applies to your time of retreat.

BIBLE READING

For many people, reading Scripture is the foundation of their retreat time. While many of us have a history of studying Scripture in an intellectual way, we would urge you in your retreat time to reflect on the PERSONAL MEANING for you and the implications for how you live your life. This probably means reading, reflecting, RE-reading, and then reflecting some more – possibly on one short passage over an extended period of time. A retreat is an opportunity to listen to what God is saying to you, in your current circumstances, at this point in your life.

HOW TO READ

You can think of the process in four stages:

1. READING – slowly and repeatedly
2. MEDITATING – after taking it in, "ruminate" on it
3. PRAYING – dialogue with God about what it means in your life
4. CONTEMPLATING – resting in the presence of God, who loves us

WHAT TO READ

Consider breaking from your daily Bible reading routine to read another passage/section/book that is of specific relevance to your circumstance at the time. If nothing comes to mind, below are some passages that focus on the process of our inner transformation that might fit well during a personal retreat.

- [ ] Matthew 5-7
- [ ] Romans 12
- [ ] I Corinthians 13
- [ ] 2 Corinthians 4
- [ ] Galatians 5
- [ ] Colossians 3 & 4
- [ ] 1 Peter 2 & 3
- [ ] 1 John 4
- [ ] Deuteronomy 10:12-21

Prayer:

We do ourselves and God a disservice by assuming that prayer is only asking things of God. Prayer is much, much more. Prayer is walking with God. It is fellowship with God. It is time set apart just to be with Him. We believe if God sent his Son to die on the cross for our sins to restore us to fellowship with God then God must want fellowship with us. Adam and Eve were created not to tend the garden but to have fellowship with God when He came as the pre-incarnate Christ to walk with them in the garden. God longs for us to spend time with him. As with lovers just being together is sometimes more than words.

Read then pray.

One approach to consider is leveraging your Bible reading to lead you to prayer. After reading a passage and meditating upon it, let your thoughts be lifted towards God and respond to Him in prayer. You can speak your prayer with a low voice to help you not to lose focus.

Write your prayers.

Another option to consider is to WRITE your prayer in your journal. Putting your words on paper makes them more real and makes prayer more tangible. As someone once said, “Thoughts disentangle themselves when they pass through the lips and fingertips.” This is definitely true about prayer as well.

Pray the Psalms

The Psalms express the cry of the human heart as found in almost all circumstances and with the full range of our emotions. Here we can find help in expressing what we may otherwise be unable to express fully to our God. Use the Psalms to lead you into prayer.

Notes

CONSIDERATIONS

IDEAS TO CONSIDER

Music: If you enjoy entering God's presence through music and song, bring along some music and songs and use them to help you connect with God throughout your day.

Devotional Reading: A retreat is a great time to read the reflections of other disciples of Jesus Christ and benefit from their experiences and insights.

Slow down. Sleeping, napping and staring at the passing clouds and birds can be part of a time of spiritual refreshing. Wasting time with God might be a way of expressing it.

Journaling. Use your journal to document what you're learning and any resolutions you are making. Also consider writing a letter to God or writing out your prayers to make them more tangible.

Walk and pray. They really can go together. Praying while walking through places of natural beauty–and while sitting on a rock or log along the trail–can be an important part of your retreat time.

Coffee Break. Have a coffee break with God. Talk to him as you would talk to a friend you are having coffee with.

Memorize. Memorize a scriptural promise God gave you.

Study. Study a specific book, chapter or word in the Bible.

Fellowship. Go on the retreat with a small group of friends. Take time out at various points in the day to share what God is teaching you and to pray and/or sing together.

THINGS TO AVOID

Technology. Nothing will kill your retreat faster than being distracted by calls, emails, text, social media, etc. You need to unplug from things to plug in to God.

Your kids. Don't try to incorporate your children into your retreat. Family time is important, but there's a time and place for everything (see Ecclesiastes 3).

People. It's nice to have fellowship at points throughout your day, but be very careful not to lose the day socializing and spending time with people. People will always be there but this is your one time to be alone with God. Don't waste it!

Distractions of food. Don't eat too much or too little. The goal is to make food/meals as little of a distraction as possible.

Anything that distracts you. God is jealous for you and doesn't want to lose His time with you. Don't bring anything that will pull you away in mind, body or spirit.

Sample Schedule

DATE: .....

note

This is only a suggestion. Ultimately, we are all wired differently and will relate to God in unique ways. Feel free to use this a sample to get ideas, but don't feel obliged to follow it exactly as is. Tailor it to what works for you. Remember that today is about meeting with God and not following a list of prescribed routines.

9:00 – 9:15 SEEKING	Start the day off with a short prayer asking for God's guidance on the day, and really seeking God.
9:15 – 9:30 STILLNESS	Practice stillness by sitting outside or in view of nature. Physically be still. The purpose of this time is to relax the body and prepare the mind to become more attentive as you enter into your special time alone with God. Some people do so by sitting quietly, others by calmly moving around such as taking a walk. Often when we begin, our minds are cluttered and we feel distracted. Don't fight your thoughts during this time, but keep bringing your attention back to the fact that you are in God's presence. You can keep praying Psalm 61:1, "Here my cry, Oh God, Listen to pray."
9:30 – 10:00 BIBLE READING	Read and reread your selected passage. It may help to read it out loud because there is great power in the spoken Word. When something in the passage strikes you, write it down and reflect on that idea. How does this passage apply to your current life situation today.
10:00 – 10:30 MEDITATING/ UNLOADING	So often we go through life in autopilot, not really knowing what is inside of us. 1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your cares on Him for He cares for you." This is your time to be fully authentic and honest with your Creator. He wants to know every little detail about what's going inside of you. Sometimes our busyness is how we hide from what is truly inside of us. However, what we conceal, He cannot heal.
10:30 – 11:15 SHARING	Use this time to discuss what God is teaching you with a friend. It could be anything you read today or heard Him saying so far. Encourage one another and pray for each other.
11:15 –12:15 READING	Read a spiritual book (see Resource section for suggestions).
12:15 – 1:00 LUNCH	Don't waste too much time here. Eat quickly and get back to what you came for.

Sample Schedule cont.

1:00 – 2:00 Prayer

Your prayer time could include the following aspects (Taken from *The Hour that Changes the World*) :

Structured Prayer: Begin your prayer time by reciting a prayer from the Book of Hours ("agpeya").
Praise: Set aside a few minutes to praise God at the beginning of your prayer. Choose a specific theme for praise, such as God's righteousness, mercy or Fatherhood. Drawing on your selected theme, declare vocally all that God.
Waiting: After your time of praise, bring your mind and spirit into a time of complete silence to the world. Try to think no thoughts except thoughts of God the Father, His Son, Jesus or the Holy Spirit. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to God. Concentrate fully on the love aspect of God's nature during the silence.
Confession: Ask God to search your heart for any unconfessed sin. Confess it and ask God for His supernatural healing and help in that area.
Intercession: Make a list of people who come to mind that need prayers and pray for each one.
Petition: Offer up to God any specific needs that have come to mind from your retreat time.
Thanksgiving: Offer specific thanksgiving for spiritual, material, physical, and external blessings. Try to thank God for something in specific that you haven't thanked him for before. You can also thank God in advance for blessings you expect him to bestow on you in the future.
Singing: Pause in your devotional hour to sing a specific song onto the Lord.
Listening: In the "listening" time of prayer do not hesitate to ask God very specific questions about difficult problems or situations. Search scriptures for specific answers to your questions. Mentally evaluate all circumstances that relate to a specific problem. Ask God to show you His plan through those circumstances. Be prepared to write any ideas God may share concerning the details of solving a specific problem.
Praise AGAIN: End your prayer with specific praise concerning God's greatness. Focus your praise on His omnipotence (power), His omniscience (knowledge) and His omnipresence (presence). With the psalmist let us, "Praise God because He has done it." Look back at your prayer time and praise God for hearing each of your requests. Make your AMEN strong. That is your agreement with God that He has heard your prayer.

2:00 – 2:30 Activity

Take a walk with God or choose another activity from among those listed above.

2:30 – 2:45 Conclusion

Reflect on your day and write some key take away of anything God has promised you or any changes you want to make in your life.

RESOURCES

SUGGESTED BOOKS AND RESOURCES

- Absolute Surrender – Andrew Murray
- Abide in Christ – Andrew Murray
- Emotionally Healthy Spirituality – Peter Scazzero
- The Power of Simple Prayer – Joyce Meyer
- The Weapon of Prayer – EM Bounds
- The Hour that Changes the World: A Practical Plan for Personal Prayer – Dick Eastman
- Beginning to Pray – Anthony Bloom
- The Practice of the Presence of God – Brother Lawrence
- The Way of the Pilgrim – anonymous
- Hinds Feet on High Places – Hannah Hurnard