

BELOVED

Silent Retreat | Monument Presbyterian Church

Welcome to Retreat

Retreat is a spiritual practice of intentionally and strategically withdrawing from the distractions, noise, notifications and voices that constantly clamor for our attention. It is an invitation to engage more deeply with oneself and God. On retreat, one slows down to allow the mind, heart, body, and soul to quiet and to listen. To listen for and to the Holy Spirit's welcome into deeper communion with God.

This guide is a way of giving you a framework for your time of solitude and silence whether you are using it on your own or as part of the MPC Silent Day. Our hope is that you let it be just that - a guide and framework. This means there is space to move within and outside the guide. If you wander too far, use the guide to bring you back. We hope and pray that this time draws you nearer to our God and strengthens you in heart, mind, body, and soul.

General Guidelines¹

Turn off digital notifications and music. Enter into silence without cell phones, computers or digital distractions of any kind. You may want to inform anyone who might need to know that you will be unavailable for the time of the retreat.

Get settled. You may need to go for a walk to move your body or clear your mind before you settle. This might take longer than you think. Let it come in its own time, and use the spiritual practices to help you. At some point, choose to settle into solitude and quiet.

****Go at God's Pace.** The practices below are suggestions for allowing God to meet and speak to you. It is not required you do them all. When the Holy Spirit nudges you to pause, pause. If you feel the nudge to slow down, slow down. If you need to get up and move around, do that. When it's time to keep going, do so in whatever direction the Spirit leads you. The Holy Spirit is with you and directing you!

¹ This retreat is modeled off Fuller Center for Spiritual Formation Silent Retreats by Laura B. Murray

Being God's Beloved

"Beloved" means to be dearly loved. This is how we are told God loves us. Not because of what we do, or achieve, but because loving us in the very nature of who God is. God loves us first, even before we know him or turn to him. The theme for this retreat is this love of God. May we not simply accept it, but dive deeper into it. What does it truly mean, to be beloved?

In preparation for a day of letting God bathe us in his love, we will listen for the love of God in the Communal Reading of Scripture.

As you listen to the following Scripture, contemplate the love of God. Make notes within the Scripture text or use the blank spaces to write down notes, awarenesses, and observations and respond to the final question after the reading before moving on to the next practice.

Communal Reading of Scripture

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the

victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

—1 John 4:7-5:5

**What stands out, draws you in, or resonates with you?
Take this into retreat as you continue.**

“You are Mine”

The Practice of Lectio Divina

A popular worship song proclaims “your goodness is running after its running after me.” God pursues us. Whether we are hiding in fear, running in rebellion, or simply weary and distracted, God does not abandon. Instead, God comes looking—with patience, tenderness and persistence. Love doesn’t wait for us to come home; it sets out to find us.

Read or listen to the Scripture passage below four times and in four different ways. You will be given these ways in the prompts below. Read and listen steadily, and give yourself time to note what you notice.

Reading #1: Read or listen to the Scripture. No need to make notes or look for something with it. Simply listen.

Reading #2: As you read or listen, what word or phrase stands out to you? Circle it. Refrain from trying to analyze it.

Reading #3: As you read or listen, what feelings are evoked in you? Write these feelings down.

Reading #4: As you read or listen, in prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you need to be most attentive to.

*But now, this is what the LORD says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;*

*the flames will not set you ablaze.
For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
I give Egypt for your ransom,
Cush and Seba in your stead.
Since you are precious and honored in my sight,
and because I love you,
I will give people in exchange for you,
nations in exchange for your life.
Do not be afraid, for I am with you;
I will bring your children from the east
and gather you from the west.
I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'
and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'
Bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the ends of the earth—
everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made."*

--Isaiah 43:1-7

Will We Let God Love Us?²

The Practice of Examen

An aspect of growing in our faith is naming who God is and believing who God is. One way of knowing what we believe and how deep it runs is through the practice of Examen. Examen helps us to notice the ways we trust God's nearness and the ways we have yet to believe it. It is not a practice for judgment but for awareness. The Psalm below serves as a guide through the practice of Examen. Take your time to slowly go through it, responding to the Examen reflection questions throughout the Psalm.

*Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous;
it is fitting for the upright to praise him.
Praise the Lord with the harp;
make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.
Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully, and shout for joy.*

What songs do you find yourself singing about God?

What characteristics of God do these songs highlight?

*For the word of the Lord is right and true;
he is faithful in all he does.
The Lord loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of his unfailing love.*

Where do you presently see evidence of God's faithfulness and unfailing love?

Where does God's faithfulness and love seem to be absent?

*By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.
He gathers the waters of the sea into jars;
he puts the deep into storehouses.*

How does creation lead you to believe God's power?

² This practice is taken directly from Laura B. Murray, "Holiness" Retreat of Silence, *Fuller Center for Spiritual Formation*, 2025.

What do you long to be created or re-created that has yet to be?

*Let all the earth fear the Lord;
let all the people of the world revere him.
For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.
The Lord foils the plans of the nations;
he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.
But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever,
the purposes of his heart through all generations.*

Where do you see the plans of the Lord unfolding?

Where do the plans of the Lord seem to be shaky rather than firm?

*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,
the people he chose for his inheritance.
From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind;
from his dwelling place he watches
all who live on earth—
he who forms the hearts of all,
who considers everything they do.*

How do you sense God's watchfulness?

What do you wonder about God's watchfulness?

*No king is saved by the size of his army;
no warrior escapes by his great strength.
A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;
despite all its great strength it cannot save.
But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,
to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.*

Where is it easy to hold a strong hope in God's unfailing love?

Is there a person, place, or thing that you are hoping for other than God?

*We wait in hope for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.
In him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in his holy name.
May your unfailing love be with us,
Lord, even as we put our hope in you.*
--Psalm 33

In what ways is God calling you to place your hope and trust in his name and love?

Where Our Love Falls Short

The Practice of Confession

Unlike the love of God, our love is often conditional. We love when it is easy, or convenient. When we gain from the interaction. But the model of love we see in Jesus is reflected in these words by the apostle Paul:

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

--1 Corinthians 13:4-7

This is how God loves us. But is it how we love God or those around us?
Read this passage several times and pray over the following questions:

Where have I been impatient in loving?

Where have I been unkind recently?

What envy and pride am I holding in this moment?

Where am I being invited to honor and lift up others?

What anger or past wrongs am I clinging to?

How am I nurturing and protecting the loves of my life?

Spend time in prayer, take as long as you need.

Content in God's Love

The Practice Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer is a form of silent, receptive prayer in which we simply rest in God's loving presence. It is not about saying words or thinking thoughts but consenting to be with God beyond words, beyond striving.

To practice it, choose a simple sacred word. Review your notes and choose a word to gently anchor your attention. As you sit in silence (start with 10 minutes if this is new for you), return to that word when your mind drifts, not in judgment, but in trust. The goal is not stillness or focus, but openness.

This kind of prayer helps us grow in our awareness of God's nearness, even in the silence. Over time, it can soften our defenses, increase our trust, and deepen our love.

Write down a word or phrase here:

After your Centering Prayer practice, write down what came up for you. Then, take the time to express gratitude to God.

Safe in the Arms of our Beloved

Closing Benediction

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

³⁶ As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;

we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."^[a]

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[b] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

--Romans 8:35-39

May you rest this day secure in the knowledge and the experience of God's love. Love that cannot be lost. Love that will not fail. Love that endures all things. Be at peace.