

A LITTLE GUIDE TO HELP MAKE A PERSONAL PRAYER RETREAT LESS INTIMIDATING.

“Be still, and know that I am God!
I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.” Psalm 46:10 (NLT)

1. Why prioritize personal prayer retreat?

Jesus did.

Think about others through Scripture who encountered God in times of silence and solitude.

But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer. Luke 5:16 (NLT)

“Wilderness” = Eremos. It can be translated: desert, lonely place, desolate place, wilderness, empty place. // The Eremos is a place of quiet. Jesus had a habit of going to the Eremos. When we follow his example, we allow ourselves to resist hurry, slow down, and face the inner noise that often distracts us.

“Hurry is not just a disordered schedule. Hurry is a disordered heart.” John Ortberg

A personal, solitude retreat is a time of cleansing for our disordered hearts. It's a time we face ourselves and God and allow him to lead us beside still waters and restore our souls (Psalm 23). It's difficult, beautiful, and very worthwhile.

2. Where to go?

Somewhere quiet and secluded. In the Lower Mainland:

Cedar Springs in Sumas. / The Mark Centre in Abbotsford / Rivendell on Bowen Island / Arocha in Surrey. / Westminster Abbey in Mission.

3. How to prepare?

- Book in the time. If going overnight, book in 20-24hrs. If it's a daytime retreat then set aside 5+ hours to be at one location, present and unhurried.
- Prepare to be able to unplug and detach from regular rhythms and commitments. Ideally, you want to make a commitment to turn your phone off, use no screens, access no internet, and only do one phone call to check-in with family (if applicable).
- Purchase a book to read and choose a portion of Scripture you want to read or meditate upon.
- Identify a goal for the retreat. Preferably the goal is to simply *enjoy God*.
 - Ideally, this is not focused on content or productivity but rather connectivity with God. A goal could be: “to be refreshed in God's presence” or to “receive a fresh sense of his love” or “to receive guidance for a decision.” You may want to write down a few questions you want to ask God.

4. What to during the retreat?

- **Pray. Read. Walk. Journal. Sit. Repeat.**
- One may be tempted to look at one's phone or distract oneself with all the common practices that occur when we are bored. Resist this. Make a commitment to stay offline and away from all screens and distractions.
- Choose a portion or book of scripture to read and ask God questions as you read, allow him to speak to you.
- Mix up your reading and prayer time with reading a specific book to stir your heart and imagination. A few recommended books are below. Bring one along to read.
- Go for prayer walks to help yourself focus. Pray out loud as you walk. Share your emotions and thoughts with God.
- Journal and write our your prayers to God.
- Experiment with different ways of praying, reflecting, and connecting with God. The goal is God. Allow yourself to face your distractions, anxiety, and fears. Face the fear of solitude and silence and let yourself meet God there. Be honest with him and be present with him - as you are.

Resources:

Practicing His Presence, Lawrence and Laubach

Invitation to Solitude and Silence, Barton.

The way of the heart, Nouwen.

A Testament of Devotion, Kelly.

"In the midst of the outwards busyness of my life there was an inner chaos that was far more disconcerting. It was particularly alarming to realize that even though I had been a Christian for many years, I was struggling with some of the basics of the spiritual life...At best, I was impatient with the demands of life in the company of others; at worst I was angry that people wouldn't just leave me alone to pursue my own dreams and ambitions...I did not know how to love - really. Particularly when love was demanding or inconvenient or interfered with my own desires I did not know how to die to myself in even the smallest way. ...[this] was just the tip of the iceberg. There were enormous questions right under the surface of my busy life...there were questions about what was lurking deep in the subterranean levels of the soul: What was motivating the frenetic quality of my life and schedule? Why did I find it terribly hard to say no, even when my overcommitment hurt those closest to me? Would I come to the end of my life only to mourn poor choices that did not reflect what is most to be prized?...
*In the midst of much outward productivity, the interior spaces of my life resonated with words like, "There has to be more to the spiritual life than this." Sometimes the words were quiet and wistful, full of profound sadness. At other times they were feisty, fighting words full of a lack of acceptance: *This can't be all there is!*"*

-Ruth Haley Barton, *An Invitation to Solitude and Silence*,

"Solitude is the furnace of transformation." - Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*.