



PERSONAL SPIRITUAL RETREAT

3-5 HOURS ALONE WITH GOD

Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. -Jesus



PREPARE FOR YOUR TIME

find 3-5 hours where you can be alone

To prepare, you may need support from others. Perhaps it's someone who can watch your kids, or asking for time off from your work communication if need be. You will also need to consider how to find time alone. It may be as simple as asking those you live with if you can have a half day with no interruptions in your bedroom. Outside may be a great option if the weather cooperates.

This experience will be ideal if you don't have any technology at arms length. So if you can print this guide, that would be beneficial. Also bring a printed Bible and a notebook and pen.

If you need technology for music, to keep time, or to follow this guide, that is ok too. I suggest muting all notifications and/or move all task apps off the home screen temporarily.



Opening Prayer by Civil Rights Leader Howard Thurman (1899-1981)

"Our little lives, our big problems—these we place upon Your altar!
The quietness in Your temple of silence again and again rebuffs us:
For some there is no discipline to hold them steady in the waiting,
And the minds reject the noiseless invasion of Your spirit.
For some there is no will to offer what is central in the thoughts—
The confusion is so manifest, there is no starting place to take hold.
For some the evils of the world tear down all concentrations
And scatter the focus of the high resolves.
We do not know how to do what we know to do.
We do not know how to be what we know to be.
Our little lives, our big problems—these we place upon Your altar!
Pour out upon us whatever our spirits need of shock, of life, of release
That we may find strength for these days—Courage and hope for tomorrow.
In confidence we rest in Your sustaining grace
Which makes possible triumph in defeat, gain in loss, and love in hate.
We rejoice this day to say:
Our little lives, our big problems—these we place upon Your altar!

Howard Washington Thurman (November 18, 1899 – April 10, 1981) was an African-American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader. As a prominent religious figure, he played a leading role in many social justice movements and organizations of the twentieth century. Thurman's theology of radical nonviolence influenced and shaped a generation of civil rights activists, and he was a key mentor to leaders within the civil rights movement, including Martin Luther King Jr.



Suggested structure for your time.

➤ *Suggested structure:*

- 10-15 Minutes - Quiet Your Mind
- 15-20 Minutes - Read and Meditate: Proverbs 4:1-9
- 20-30 Minutes - Journal Session 1
- 10-40 Minutes - Physical Movement
- 15-20 Minutes - Read and Meditate: James 3:13-18
- 20-30 Minutes - Journal Session 2
- 10-40 Minutes - Physical Movement
- 15-20 Minutes - Read and Meditate: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16
- 10-30 Minutes - Journal Session 3
- 10-20 Minutes - Surrender Practice

Directions:

➤ *Quiet Your Mind*

10-15 Minutes

Start your time with some quiet. If you are not able to be in a noise free location, consider listening to instrumental music. If indoors, consider lighting a candle and focusing your eyes on the flame. If outside, pick one object, a tree, or some water, or a plant to focus your eyes on. Try to focus your mind and heart on God's presence with you. Be kind to yourself. Your mind can be like a puppy learning to sit - when it "wanders off", gently bring it back to focus.

Tip: When things you need to do or remember for later come to mind, write them down on a sheet of paper you will pick up after this process.

Do not withhold your mercy from me, Lord; may your love and
faithfulness always protect me. - Psalm 40



➤ *Read and Meditate on Proverbs 4:1-9*

15-20 Minutes

Read through the passage once. Now read it a second time, underlining or writing down what seems to stick out to you. Now read it a third time, this time pause between each stanza and ask God to reveal anything specific to you.

Bonus: Read this passage in a few different translations or paraphrases. For instance The Message or The Passion Translation. Did anything different stick out to you when you read from a different paraphrase?

➤ *Journal Session 1 - Look back at God's Leadership in Your Life*

20-30 Minutes

Take time to look back on the ways God has led you in your life in the past. When you reflect where do you see God's wisdom, when did you sense a void of God's wisdom. What were the emotions surrounding these different scenarios? What were the outcomes? Start with looking back over a week, then a month, then perhaps since the beginning of the year. Then look back over the the last few years and even to a season in the distant past if the Spirit brings it to mind.

➤ *Physical Movement*

10-40 Minutes

It's a good idea to incorporate physical movement in an extended time of contemplation. What you choose to do will depend on your physical location. This time could just be stretching or slow movements in a room. If it's possible to walk in nature, this would be a great option as well. Choose a length of time that feels helpful for you in this process.

Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. - Proverbs 4



➤ *Read and Meditate on James 3:13-18*

15-20 Minutes

Read through the passage once. Now read it a second time, underlining or writing down what seems to stick out to you. Now read it a third time, this time pause between every 3-4 verses and ask God to reveal anything specific to you.

➤ *Journal Session 2 - Look around to see where wisdom is needed in your life today*

20-30 Minutes

To observe where you need God's wisdom in your daily life, we will use a adaptation of the Ignatian practice called a "daily examen". This is an outline of how you can do this process. Draw a vertical line down the middle of a page. On the top of the left side write the phrase "in need of wisdom" on the right side the phrase "experiencing peace". Now think back over the last 24-48 hours. As you think through your waking hours, list experiences or circumstances where you may need God's wisdom. Then on the other side write the experiences or moments where you have been experiencing peace from God - where you are feeling settled.

Once you finish your lists, pray for wisdom over the different areas of life that you noted you are in need of God's wisdom. Thank God for areas of life in which you were experiencing peace, even if it is small moments.

➤ *Physical Movement*

10-40 Minutes

Let this time be what is most helpful for you. If a short time of movement is beneficial don't feel as though you need to prolong the time. However, at this point in your time alone, you may need to get your heart rate up in order to stay focused and come back to your time refreshed.

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. - James 1:5



➤ *Read and Meditate on 1 Corinthians 2:1-16*

15-20 Minutes

Read through the passage once. Now read it a second time, underlining or writing down what seems to stick out to you. Now read it a third time, this time pause between every 3-4 verses and ask God to reveal anything specific to you.

➤ *Journal Session 3 - Give God your future and ask God for wisdom.*

20-30 Minutes

Journal all the things that you feel anxious about or worried about in your future. Write out all the uncertainties you are facing when you think of the next few weeks, months, or even years. Take time to give this uncertainty to God.

Write out a prayer asking God to give you wisdom in the midst of uncertainty. Pray specifically about everything you write about above. Then ask God to give you trust beyond your circumstances knowing that God will some day make all wrong things right.

➤ *Surrender Practice*

10-20 Minutes

Sit comfortably with your hands out in front of you. Close your hands into a fist. Think about all the things you journaled about that are weighing on you. Think about others you may be concerned or worried about. Now begin to do your best to release these circumstances to God. Slowly open your hands, opening your fingers slowly as you try to release what you are carrying and give it to God. Let this spirit of freedom be what leads you as you go from this time through the rest of your day.

What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. -1 Corinthians 2:12



Closing Prayer by Howard Thurman

“Open unto me—light for my darkness.
Open unto me—courage for my fear.
Open unto me—hope for my despair.
Open unto me—peace for my turmoil.
Open unto me—joy for my sorrow.
Open unto me—strength for my weakness.
Open unto me—wisdom for my confusion.
Open unto me—forgiveness for my sins.
Open unto me—tenderness for my toughness.
Open unto me—love for my hates.
Open unto me—Thy Self for my self.
Lord, Lord, open unto me!”



The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and
be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.
– Numbers 6