



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.



Suggested structure for your time.

➤ *Suggested structure:*

- 10-15 Minutes - Quiet Your Mind
- 15-20 Minutes - Read and Meditate: Psalm 40
- 20-30 Minutes - Journal Session 1
- 10-40 Minutes - Physical Movement
- 15-20 Minutes - Read and Meditate: John 10
- 20-30 Minutes - Journal Session 2
- 10-40 Minutes - Physical Movement
- 15-20 Minutes - Read and Meditate: Romans 5:1-11
- 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.



➤ *Read and Meditate on Psalm 40*

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: A very meaningful practice can be to let this Psalm guide you in writing your own version of this Psalm. Use some of the psalmists words if you want, but you could swap out sentences for things that are on your heart right now. This is not something that has to be published or shared - it is just between you and God.

➤ *Journal Session 1 - Look back at God's Faithfulness*

20-30 Minutes

Take time to make a list of God's faithfulness in your life. This is not merely listing what you are grateful for, though that may be a *part* of your list. Think also about the tough times God has brought you through. Start with looking back over a week, then a month, then perhaps since the beginning of the year. Then think back on an overall timeline of your life. How has God been faithful to you in the ups and downs of life?

➤ *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.

Many, Lord my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us. - Psalm 40



➤ *Read and Meditate on John 10*

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 God's Presence*

20-30 Minutes

To observe God's presence in your daily life, many have used 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 "close to God" on the right side the phrase "far from God". Now think back over the last 24-48 hours. As you think through your waking hours, list experiences or moments where you felt close to God - and those where you felt far from God.

Once you finish your lists, invite Jesus to show in you what his Spirit was doing in both the moments where he felt near and far. In prayer, ask Jesus to show you through your imagination where he was physically in the room during a moment from each column.

➤ *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.

The sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. - John 10



➤ *Read and Meditate on Romans 5:1-11*

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 hope.*

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 hope in the midst of uncertainty. This is not merely asking God for an optimistic view of the future. Instead, 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 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.

God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. -Romans 5



Closing Prayer by Thomas Merton

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone."



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