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SPIRITUAL RETREAT

Dear Friend in Christ,

Hello! You have taken the first step into a beautiful space that is for only you and God. There may be some hesitation or expectation of what you will receive or not receive from this experience. The real first part of this process is to be present and open in this journey. Allow your comfort zone to be stretched a little and commit to disconnecting from our crazy-busy schedules and

rest

restore

reconnect with God.

This experience is self-care. Far too often, we consume our energy and time to the priority of others around us and add ourselves to the bottom of the list. Why do we do that? Are we worthy of taking time for ourselves to rejuvenate and reenergize? The answer is YES. In case there was any hesitation, the answer will always be YES.

So, this guide will provide some suggested instructions to encourage you to be creative with your time, flexible with how the process works for you, and keep it simple. Read over the various spiritual practices before you begin your retreat. Lean into welcoming God's presence with you during this sacred time. Then, start this whole process by committing to it by writing in your planner or on your calendar a "reservation with God." Hold to that reservation. Block the time. Find a quiet space, a retreat center, or an outdoor area that will allow you to rest, just for you, and let the journey begin.

WHAT YOU NEED

In a small backpack or tote, you should pack the following items:

- This guide book
- Bible- try not to use a Bible app so that you're not distracted to use your phone for other purposes
- Journal
- Pen/pencil/markers/colored pencils- totally up to you to use what you are comfortable with
- Water bottle
- A small snack (granola bar, fruit, trail mix)- again, totally up to you

Let's discuss some different spiritual disciplines that may help you have a more in-depth experience during this time. This is by no means the only list of suggested ideas, but ways to encourage the process if you're not sure where to begin. We interact and relate to the people in our lives differently, so treat these disciplines as a way to feel comfortable with your time with God.

- **Centering Prayer**- This method of contemplative prayer can be linked back to the 4th-century. **The purpose of this spiritual discipline is to let go of every thought and focus on prayer.** Some steps to help through Centering Prayer are:
 - o Commit a certain amount of time for this practice. 10-20 minutes
 - o Choose a sacred word (Father, Jesus, Abba, Friend, etc.) to consent to the time in God's presence.
 - o Find a comfortable spot to sit and close your eyes. Settle into the silence, and then introduce your sacred word into that space.
 - o There will be times where distracting thoughts

will enter, and you will find yourself experiencing distractions (trust me, this will happen), this is when you focus back on your sacred word. Return to it and the presence of God. Repeat this process as many times as it takes (there are no limits to returning to God's presence.)

o When the time is up, sit and take in the experience.

It will take time and practice. It is natural for the mind to become distracted. Allow yourself the grace to go back and try and try. Don't feel like it is useless because it doesn't work. You are acknowledging that you want the desired time with God, and he knows you are there.

- **Silence + Solitude-**

The practice of Silence + Solitude is not to feel lonely, but for the fulfillment of spending time in God's presence and listening. We live in a society that is consumed by noises. It is difficult to hear God speaking to us when there is no room for silence. In Richard Foster's "Celebration of Discipline," he suggests that instead of trying to find a significant gap of time in the day to commit to solitude, begin with small moments in the day (like while driving in the car on your way to work, running errands, or maybe even when you take a shower.) These small moments can hold great significance when practiced regularly. Listen. That is all you need to do during this time. Just listen.

Ruth Haley Barton says, "It is in silence that we habitually release our agendas and our need to control and become more willing and able to give ourselves to God's loving initiative." (*Invitation to Solitude and Silence*).

- **Breath Prayer-**

This contemplative prayer is a connection of your breath and your prayer. Simple. Breath prayer is allowing the life of Christ to be breathed in and breathing out Christ's work. As you sit in a quiet, comfortable space, begin this practice:

Breathe in- calling on a name or image you have
of God

Breathe out- a simple God-given desire

A few examples:

"Holy Father, shine on me."

"Lord, have mercy."

"Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

Breathe in "His love, strength, and light"

Breathe out "fear."

- **Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)-**

This spiritual practice invites you into God's presence either by listening to or reading aloud scripture and, hearing a particular word or phrase for you from God. When you hear that word or phrase, allow yourself to sit with it and reflect on it. There is no need to question why that is your word or to question whether it's for you. Write it down in your journal or underline in your Bible. The process of reading the scripture happens four times.

1. Read through the passage slowly. When you hear a word or phrase, sit with that for a moment.

2. Reread the passage. Where does that word or phrase connect with your life right now?

3. Reread the passage. Has God invited you to respond to this word or phrase?

4. Reread the passage. Receive the word or phrase and rest in God's presence and love.

Select a scripture passage of your choosing (try to keep the reading short, 4-6 verses), or try one of the following:

- o Mark 10:46-52
- o Isaiah 43: 1-4
- o Psalm 23: 1-6

- **Rest.** You read that correctly. Rest. If it means closing your eyes and taking a nap, then do it. We have limits, our body needs boundaries, or we endure burn-out. When we rest, we honor God because we are caring for our bodies.

- o Read Psalm 62:1: My soul finds rest in God alone.

- o Delight in your time of rest. As you sit, walk, admire, breathe in the beauty around you.

- Acknowledge that what you see was created by God, and it says in Genesis 2:2 "on the seventh day God rested..."

The disciplines mentioned above are only suggestions to help initiate a time of retreat. If your time of retreat means going on a hike and admiring the progress of the walk, then let that be your time with God. If your time of retreat means sitting at home, then find a comfy chair and engage with God in that way.

Lastly, find a prayer partner, accountability partner, or trusted friend and share your plans. Let them be in prayer for you during this sacred time. Be blessed on this journey.



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