

## Your PERSONAL Retreat

A PERSONAL retreat is a time to go off alone and wrestle with God. It can be done in many ways, but this simple framework can help you focus your time. Half-day (2-3 hour retreats) work well for most people, but longer can work.

- Go to a secluded place. Being interruption-free is essential. Pick a place out in nature, or if that's not possible, pick an indoor space with a view free of distractions. Walking/hiking works great.
- Leave your phone turned off. Bring low-tech resources: paper journal, paper bible, water, and snacks. Print these instructions to avoid reading them on a device.
- The first part of your retreat is simply detoxing from connection and getting quiet. Use music on the drive to your location to help you worship, or drive in silence to practice being still.
- Once you begin your formal retreat time, avoid using music or other distractions. It's uncomfortable at first, but eventually, you'll be able to sit with yourself. God is always speaking, but our ability to listen is diminished through all our life distractions.
- Try walking and simply notice the world around you. Start from a place of seeing and appreciating the world God gave us. Spend at least 30 minutes simply noticing and appreciating the world around you.
- Then choose a spot to sit or keep moving, but start to take your attention inward. Open up a dialogue with God by inviting him to speak. Resist the urge to fill the space with lots of talking; this is about giving room for God to speak to you.
- It's not unusual to find yourself in a time of confession before God, especially for your noisiness, mismanagement of what's been entrusted to you, your poor prioritization of eternal kingdom matters over worldly things, and the things that lead your heart away from God. It can be helpful to use a Psalm to guide your confession. Some good options might be Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, or 143.
- Now invite God to speak by asking a specific question that is on your heart/mind. If you are not wrestling with a particular topic but seeking a deeper connection with God, a general question like, **"God, what should I focus my attention on in this next season of life? What do you want for our family?"** might work. Then listen, take your focus inward to your breath, to your body movement, and just listen. You don't need to force anything; you're not trying to imagine; you're just making yourself quiet and available. Sometimes, you may get overwhelmed by an idea that feels like it came from outside of you; other times, you may not feel or hear anything. Don't worry, don't judge yourself. The experience of getting quiet and inviting God to speak is rewarding in and of itself. Leave yourself time; there's no rush.
- Gradually move forward to other questions, start broad, and then get narrower.
  - Ask God questions such as:
    - **"Who are the people I see daily that need to know the love of Jesus?"**
    - **"What gifts has God given me that I can use to serve others?"**
    - **"In what areas of my life do I need to grow in this season?"**
    - **"Is there anything holding me back from moving forward?"**

- As you put your questions before God, write down any impressions in your journal. Make sure to follow any promptings to throw open your bible and read what's on the page or pursue a specific scripture reference God brings to mind. Also, notice any signs of God's presence and direction in nature that might come suddenly; it's all his and up for his use! Sometimes, you may hear really insightful "otherworldly" things, or you may feel like you're hearing your own thoughts, but they're sharper and clearer, and sometimes, you may hear nothing; just enjoy the gift of space. Again, you can't force God into an encounter; you can simply make yourself available.
- If you get antsy, start hiking again, take in more nature, seek out another place to stop, and repeat the question process.
- But before you wrap up, ask God one more time, **"Is there anything else you want to say to me today? I'm trying to give you my attention; help me hear you if there's anything else you want to speak into my life."** Sometimes God finally speaks (or you may eventually hear!), or you may still hear nothing. Go in peace, knowing you've given God every opportunity to speak to you.
- Before you leave your retreat, whether you feel you've heard from God or not, take time to revisit the questions you put before God. You might find that your mind is now clearer and your thinking is sharper. Regardless, don't end your time without writing your thoughts in your journal. Use your God-given intellect and life experiences to consider what you've written. It's helpful to note recurring themes or connections you see in your notes.
- After your retreat, do something pampering. Eat a great meal by yourself, or get a massage. Do something satisfying but still solitary. Enjoy being alone and the space you've created. Stay away from the phone, music, etc., for as long as possible. Be open to God's speaking throughout the day.
- Your sleep may feel different after a retreat, or you may have clarity later on. Keep your journal close and write down any additional thoughts or ideas.
- Most of all, ENJOY THE SPACE!