

A Simple Retreat Guide

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Introduction

This is a short guide designed to help you “get out there” and experience the significant benefits of taking a personal retreat. We’ll go over the basic questions people often ask about why and how to go on a retreat, along with some other ideas to help you get the most out of your invaluable time with the Lord.

I encourage you to read through this if you’re not sure about how to go on a retreat, or if you are looking for another slant on taking a personal retreat.

I know personal retreats have been a huge blessing in my life, and I pray the same for you as well.

Why go on a personal retreat?

Fair question. The whole point behind taking personal retreats is to have time to renew and become more alive in God. That doesn’t tend to happen without some time away. When you are on a retreat, you have a much better shot at being still and knowing God (Ps. 46:10) on deeper levels, and experiencing the peace, perspective and renewal that comes from an extended time with Him.

Our fast-paced society with all of the distractions in our midst makes it so much more difficult to slow down and connect more deeply with God and with our own souls.

And given that perhaps the greatest gift we can give to the people we lead and serve is for them to encounter more of Jesus through us, ensuring that our “streams of living water” are growing is a powerful way to bless those we serve.

Taking a concentrated time of at least 8 hours (ideally) that is solely devoted to connecting (or reconnecting) with God, and to deepening our sense of identity in Him, is vitally important to reducing our stress levels and helping us mature in Him.

Daily devotions and prayer times definitely need to be staples in our diets to grow in the Lord, but regular retreat days, as in monthly or quarterly, can be invaluable to truly deepening our walks with God. In other words, some insights or transformations often only come through a concentrated time away.

Did Jesus get away? Did He take retreats?

Absolutely. Regularly. There are a number of verses to cite, such as Matt. 13:1, Mark 1:35-37, Luke 4:42, but because this is a short guide I will just list this one verse from Luke 5:15-16 (NIV): “Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. [16] But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

Because of the intensity of his ministry, and because I believe Jesus’s time with his Dad was so good for his soul, he just had to get away regularly to be renewed, affirmed, and strengthened in his identity and calling.

And actually, the entire ministry of Jesus began with a retreat of sorts. Right after his baptism we are told in Luke 4:1-2 that: “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.”

I’m sure that was a real powerful time for Jesus...to pass the tests, deepen his sense identity and be further equipped to launch into the greatest ministry of all time. Luke 4:14 points out how “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit,” which I’m imagining made Jesus pretty intense and very compelling.

I wish those things for you too as you go on your retreats!

What to bring

Bible

Journal

Two or three of your favorite spiritual books.

What to wear

Whatever is comfortable for you. Ideally you will be going on a nice walk or two during the retreat day, so wear clothes and shoes that fit for that activity.

Mindset

I encourage you to think of the day as a day to receive from the Lord in a number of ways.

I believe it is important to see this day in some ways as a step of faith. You don’t know what good gifts God will give you on your retreat day. It can be valuable to see taking this day as a way of surrendering control over your life and asking God to lead and guide you to greater freedom and trust in Him.

Building on that idea, a retreat day is not a day about accomplishment and productivity. This is a day devoted to becoming more rooted and established in love (Eph. 3:17). This is a day devoted

to receiving encouraging words from the Lord. This is a day to be affirmed in your identity in Him and be encouraged about who you are becoming in Him.

For some of you that day will include some challenges from the Lord, maybe even some conviction. It is really important to remember that any conviction that comes your way needs to be evaluated in terms of whether or not it comes from a spirit of love.

Why we may avoid retreats

Well, sometimes we can be tricked into thinking we more important than we really are. What I mean is that we can all fall for the lie that we are really important, or the even worse, we can believe the lie that God just can't work things out without our help. When we are believing those lies, we will never take time for a retreat.

Then, not only do our lives suffer because we are not resting, receiving or growing in the Lord as we could, but as a result of our lack of growth and increased stress, others around us are deprived or suffer because we are not maturing! Tough news I know!

It is true, that sometimes we have to postpone retreats because of unexpected circumstances that do require our presence.

The bigger issues are often that we have let so much be asked of us that we don't have time for a retreat, or we have put so much on our own plate, that we don't have time to get away. Sadly enough, when either or both of those are happening, our souls invariably get smaller and our lives and ministry eventually suffer

Another reason people may avoid a retreat is because they are afraid of what they will discover about themselves, or may find themselves feeling if they really slow down. That is an understandable fear. Unpleasant truths and difficult emotions are never fun to face or feel. Yet, when we avoid going those places we remain prisoners of those fears. And, the freedom the Gospel promises is not realized when we let fear win.

I encourage you to remember that you are deeply loved, and that there is nothing that you will face or feel that is bigger than the love God has for you. God longs for you to be free from the lies Satan has sent your way, and letting God into your fears and regrets lets Him bring a peace and freedom to your soul that you were made for. As you grow in inner freedom, you can live life to the full with greater joy, and help others in more powerful ways.

The rhythm of the day

The larger point of a retreat is to rest and renew in the Lord. Therefore, it is not about following a strict agenda! A general pattern to consider following though would be:

- Beginning with a time of prayer
- Then spend time in the Word

- Consider reading one of the books you brought
- Consider journaling on what you learned from your time in the Word or other reading. (You may also want to journal before spending time in the Word about how you are doing in your life, your walk with God, and your ministry.)
- Then consider taking a walk or maybe even a nap.
- From there, it is really about following the Holy Spirit's promptings, likely in some kind pattern of prayer, time in the Word, reading other material, and journaling.
- I encourage you to consider taking a break for a walk or rest every hour to hour and a half.
- Eat lunch when you feel like it! J Unless you are fasting! J
- At the end of the day, I encourage you to write out your big takeaways and any commitments you may have made to the Lord, so you can review those at a later date.

What to make room for

Make room for a nap if that is what your body needs.

Make room for some kind of physical engagement, such as going on a nice walk or two during your time.

Make room for God's grace and goodness to fill your soul in ways you don't expect. How about that!?!

What to be on the watch for

This is not fun to share, but you need to be on the watch for temptation during your retreat day. It happened to Jesus in the desert, and it will very likely happen for you. The temptation will likely be in a form you are currently battling, based on my personal experience. I encourage you to see the day as a chance to get better at passing tests God allows your way, and as a way to lean into His remarkable grace more and more, whatever comes your way.

If you do stumble, confess it, repent and to continue to persevere and over time you will be able to overcome temptation more and more often, even when you have the opportunity to sin.

As you mature in Him, you will experience His grace and mercy in more compelling and freeing ways.

Where to go for your retreat?

Great question. Some of you may really prefer a more suburban setting, where you can journal at a coffee shop, or have a nice lunch, or maybe even hang out in the lobby of a really nice hotel! (I've done that more than a few times on a retreat!)

Others of you may prefer a state park, an Arboretum, or perhaps even a bona fide retreat center. I know I have enjoyed all of those options because you are much closer to nature, and usually have access to silence much more readily.

Wrapping up:

Getting away for a day or more is vital to a vibrant, deepening relationship with God. When that is pursued regularly, it becomes a rich source of transformation for your soul, that has countless benefits for others too.

Leaders I have coached that have been able to incorporate retreats consistently have done so much better over time at maintaining their passion and energy for ministry. It is just true.

Going on retreats is biblical and vital to flourishing as a Christian and especially as a Christian leader. In some ways, going on personal retreats is a kind of stewardship of your soul and calling.

The biggest thing initially is to just do it. Think and pray of places that would work for you, do a bit of research, schedule it, let someone know you're going so they can pray for you and perhaps hold you accountable for going, and then go. Put your uncertainties and fears aside and just go for it!

May you clearly sense God's presence and blessing in your life as you take steps towards making personal retreats a part of your regular spiritual routine.