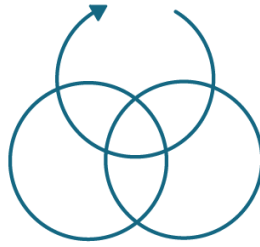


Making Space for God to Speak into My Work



A Monthly Retreat Guide

By Carolyn Carney and Julie Meissner

Introduction

Begin by putting dates into your calendar. When will you take a monthly retreat? (Just like a recurring meeting, but with God!) Retreat of silence days happen if they are regular and scheduled. Choose a day to set aside 4-6 hours alone. Next, find a place that is conducive to quiet and prayer. Some people need to be in nature to take their retreat, while others need a quiet room or retreat center, far from distractions. What is it that you need?



Dallas Willard says, "Of all the disciplines of abstinence, solitude is generally the most fundamental in the beginning of the spiritual life, and it must be returned to again and again as that life develops."¹

2-3 Day Retreat

For those who have difficulty slowing down in just a day and for those who can get away for a longer time, we suggest a 2-night/3-day retreat once a season. This creates more spaciousness for rest, reflection, scripture, listening to God, and prayer. Bring some spiritual reading with you and spread out your prayer and scripture time over the entire retreat.

A Single Retreat Day

- A. If you are an extrovert or if verbally processing is valuable to you, consider taking the retreat with a colleague or a ministry-minded person who understands your job. A suggested timetable:

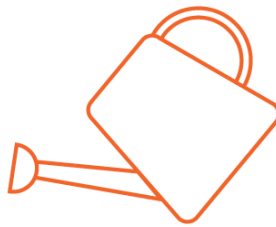
¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of The Disciplines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 161.

- 1) Meet in the morning upon arrival (suggestion: 9:30 am) or use the drive to the retreat venue if you are able, to share a brief update of how you are coming into the time and what you are looking for in the day from the Lord.
- 2) Pray for one another.
- 3) Go off to be alone (around 10 am)
- 4) Meet for a silent lunch.
- 5) Go off to be alone again.
- 6) Meet at an agreed-upon time to debrief and pray with one another before departing (suggestion: 3:30).

B. If you are taking this retreat alone, take breaks for walks, recreation, or reflection on the questions as you walk.

BRING—retreat guide, Bible, journal, favorite writing instrument(s), food and drink, art supplies if desired, (and spiritual reading book plus overnight necessities if taking a 2-3 day retreat).

LEAVE—phone, electronic devices, books, calendar, work, and anything else distracting from the voice of God.



ARRIVAL EXERCISE

(During the time allotted for this arrival exercise, if you find yourself quite tired, take a short nap, or if a walk outdoors refreshes you, do that. Take a minute or so and listen to your body, what does your body need?)

“Refreshing rest is that which renews us in the image of God, and in which we experience and delight in something of how God intends life in His creation to be (Genesis 1 and 2).”²

² Susan P. Currie, “Principles of Refreshing Rest” (Leadership Transformations Inc., 2014).



Become still

Find a comfortable, quiet place to sit. Sit with both feet flat on the floor, hands resting on your lap. Pay attention to your body. Where in your body are you holding tension? Slowly move your muscles and/or body parts to loosen the tension.

Breathe

Notice the pattern of your breathing. Gradually take deeper breaths, paying attention to the exhale. A “breath prayer” may help you to focus. A breath prayer is a simple sentence prayer where you say one part of the sentence as you inhale and the second part upon exhale. Repeat with each breath 3-4 times. Breath prayer brings your focus to Jesus and his presence with you. Something like, “*The Lord is my shepherd, I have all that I need,*” or “*Abba, I belong to you,*” or “*Come Holy Spirit, fill me with you.*”

(Throughout the retreat, if you find yourself distracted, return to your breath prayer.)

Reflect

Think back over the last month. Recall the events, places, people you’ve been with. Journal your responses to the following questions.

- As you recall these, what are you thankful for? Where have you seen God moving?
- What has been hard? How has that affected your feelings, relationships, sleep, prayer? When and under what circumstances have you resisted God? Where do you need fresh insight, hope?
- How are you feeling coming into this time? How do you feel about “not engaging in work” or staying off social media while on retreat? Tell the Lord.

“Solitude is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter--the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self.”³

RETREAT MATERIAL

Scripture

³ Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (Manhattan: Ballantine Books, 2003), 16.

Ask the Lord to accompany you as you read his word. Using your journal, let the following questions guide your exploration of this text for you personally.

- 1) After reading it once or twice, write down what words or phrases come to mind.
- 2) What do these mean? What did they mean at that time?
- 3) What does all this mean to you? How does it connect to your personal history, your life, your work?
- 4) Tell God how these things make you feel or what you have thought about.
- 5) Is there a truth here that I am resisting? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you.
- 6) Lastly, what would you like to give God? What do you want of God?



Romans 5:1-11, The Message

1-2 By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that’s not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide-open spaces of God’s grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

3-5 There’s more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we’re hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we’re never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can’t round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!

6-8 Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn’t, and doesn’t, wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we were far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready. And even if we hadn’t been so weak, we wouldn’t have known what to do anyway. We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for, and we can understand how someone good and noble could inspire us to

selfless sacrifice. But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him.

9-11 Now that we are set right with God by means of this sacrificial death, the consummate blood sacrifice, there is no longer a question of being at odds with God in any way. If, when we were at our worst, we were put on friendly terms with God by the sacrificial death of his Son, now that we're at our best, just think of how our lives will expand and deepen by means of his resurrection life! Now that we have actually received this amazing friendship with God, we are no longer content to simply say it in plodding prose. We sing and shout our praises to God through Jesus, the Messiah!

Pause

Take a break from mentally reflecting, and instead engage your body and brain in other ways. If you brought art supplies, you could create something in response to your time with God in God's word. You may enjoy taking a walk and moving your body or even dancing or singing. Do what feels most invited by God's Spirit.



Pray

Draw a random blob, like a cloud or whatever shape you prefer, in your journal or on a piece of paper, large enough to write within the shape.

- 1) Write the name of God that you feel most present to in the center of the blob.
- 2) What things do you want to thank God for? Write words of gratitude around the inside of the blob line.
- 3) What people do you long to hold to God in prayer? Write their names inside the blob around God's name.
- 4) What sins do you need to confess to God? Write these along the outside of the blob line.

- 5) What people do you need to forgive? Write their names outside the blob shape, anywhere on the paper, releasing unforgiveness as you do.
- 6) Sit in silence with your prayer art, offering it to God.



Reviewing Reality

(Use if taking a longer retreat or time allows, otherwise skip to Conclusion.)

Take time to review reality regarding your ministry and ministry partnership development. Use your journal to record what God is inviting you to notice in response.

- What is going well?
- Where am I on track? Where have I slipped?
- Where do I feel energized? Why is this?
- Where do I feel de-energized or sluggish? Why is this so?
- Where have I exhibited determination, steadfastness, and perseverance?
- Where do I need the same?
- What do I need to talk to my supervisor about? When will I do that?



Conclusion

Go back to the Scripture you read today. Go back to the question asking what you want to give God and what you want of God. What movement, if any, came for you in these questions?

Closing Reflections

- What has God been saying to me this day?
- What adjustments do I need to make for this coming month?

- When is my next retreat scheduled?

Savor the graces of the day.

Close with the Lord's Prayer or some other prayer.