

Seeds of Hope

RETREAT OF SILENCE GUIDE I: SOWING



Welcome to the Seeds of Hope Retreat of Silence Guide!

We have all been through a lot in this past season, haven't we? It can be overwhelming and exhausting to navigate our way through the amounts of loss, disappointment, and chaos we have all experienced in 2020. Covid 19, racial violence and tension, natural disasters, political division and unrest, social isolation, and pivoting constantly in ministry and personal life. Not to mention additional personal losses you may have endured in this time.

Have you been asking any of these questions?

- Could anything good come from this?
- What could possibly grow in this season?
- What is God doing in the midst of so much pain and loss?
- How do I even pray right now? What do I say?

If you've found yourself asking these questions, you're in the right place.

God often uses agricultural metaphor in the Bible to describe the process of spiritual transformation. Any gardener will tell you that a harvest begins with a single seed. And that seed gets planted in the ground, dies, and transforms into a plant that grows and multiplies with life.

This Seeds of Hope series was created to help you consider the process of growth that happens in the hidden place of our hearts. The places within us where grief, anxiety, anger, and confusion may abound. It may not look like much good is happening on the surface of our lives these days, but we can trust that God is always at work growing something beyond what we can see with our eyes.

My prayer is that as you take the time to pray and reflect through this guide and related material, that God will meet you and uncover what He might be doing under the soil of suffering in your life and in our world.

Bette Dickinson
Assistant Director of Spiritual Formation

*For additional resources that will be released in tandem with these guides, follow @Bette_Dickinson on Instagram or on her blog www.bettedickinson.com/blog.

Introduction

*This guide will lead you through a retreat of silence from one to three hours long. But it can also be used for longer periods. It is intended to work within the parameters of social distancing currently in place.

Getting Ready:

Before sitting down to pray:

- Minimize distractions as much as possible.
- Consider putting your phone in airplane mode.
- Make sure you have some paper, a pen, and your Bible.
- Divide the time you have set aside into four equal periods
 - For example, if you have set aside two hours, each period will be 30 minutes long.
 - Feel free to be flexible and change the time allocated for each period as you go.

Settling In:

Begin the retreat by finding a place to settle. Take several deep breaths. As you exhale, try and release any tension you are carrying in your body. Relax. Breathe in the peace of Christ.

- Reflect on the last few weeks. How have they affected your spiritual life? Take some minutes to talk with the Holy Spirit about how the recent events have impacted you.
- What do you come seeking today? Before moving on in the retreat, sit quietly with Jesus, listening for God's voice and being aware of God's presence.

Visio Divina



Reflect

Let your eyes move through the painting series. Is there a panel that catches your eye? Focus on that portion of the work and sit with it for a minute.

Breathe in and out and let your body and mind slow down as you meditate on the piece. Invite the Lord to speak to you about what you see.

What feelings does this work evoke?

As you think about the state of your spiritual life – do one of the panels above resonate with you?

How about the ministry, the staff, or students you oversee?

What kind of prayer rises from within you as you ponder it? Consider freely journaling your response.

STEP 3

Surrendering

Read:

What does the Holy Spirit want you to notice?

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

JOHN 12:23-25

Respond:

- Read the text again and focus on what strikes you. What impressions or emotions come up as you read these words?
- According to Jesus, how does a plant, a ministry, a person, get to a place of fruitfulness and harvest? Where does that journey begin?
- How does that idea strike you? What do you think Jesus means by "anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life?"



Reflect:

Jesus models a willingness to surrender to God in the midst of suffering through the Cross. Rather than running from pain and loss, Jesus chose to enter into it on our behalf. Suffering affords us the opportunity to know Christ more deeply. Paul puts it this way,

"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."

-Phil 3:10-11

As we follow Jesus and participate with Him in suffering, He promises to demonstrate His resurrection power in our lives - transforming us more into the people we were made to be. But this growth is often slow and hidden. We don't often see the results right away. Only God can see what is growing under the soil of our hearts and our world.

Rest:

If possible, consider taking a walk outside and pay special attention to the various stages of things that grow. Watch for old mature plants and young saplings. Look for seeds, and if you find one, hold it in your hand. Take in the beauty of what's before you.

Notice one particular plant that catches your attention and consider the process of growth. Imagine with God what happened under the soil to lead this plant to its current state of flourishing.

How long did it take to grow? What was it like as a seed under the soil?

What might this plant look like underground where you can't see? Invite God to guide your imagination.

"Catastrophic loss will transform us or destroy us, but it will never leave us the same. The soul is elastic, like a balloon...it can grow larger through suffering."

JERRY SITTSER

STEP 4

Consider the Seeds

"Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

JOHN 12:24

Take inventory of your spiritual life.

Is there any place in your personal life or ministry where you have felt like you have been "falling to the ground and dying" as you seek to follow Jesus? How does this passage encourage or challenge you?

How have you yourself been "seed" that has been sown in love for others? Where have you experienced loss, disappointment, exhaustion, or pain in your personal life?

Take inventory of the ministry and those under your care.

What are the "seeds" you have been sowing in ministry the last few weeks? Thank God for them. Name the cost you've experienced in sowing these seeds. Bring to Him any frustrations, disappointments, or losses you've experienced in the sowing process.

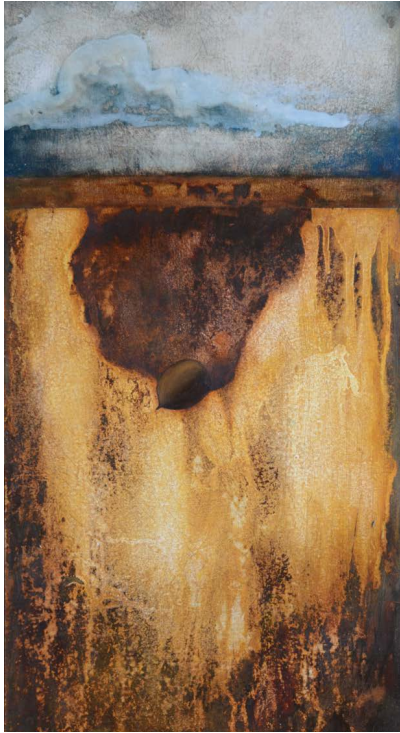
Take inventory of our world.

Where is there suffering and unrest? It's not hard to find it on the news or social media. Who are the people groups and individuals who are going through something really difficult? Which of your staff colleagues, family, or friends have experienced loss recently? How might you participate with them in their suffering and petition God to do something new on their behalf?

"Don't judge each day by the harvest
you reap, but by the seeds you plant."

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Close in Prayer



"All suffering, all pain,
all emptiness,
all disappointment is seed:
sow it in God and he will,
finally, bring a crop from it."

-Eugene Peterson

Pray:

Begin sowing any disappointment, loss, sadness, anger, or frustration with the current state of things to God. In one of the areas on the last page (personal, ministry, or world), ask God to show you what might be happening underground where you cannot see. It is often when we can't see fruit in the natural realm that He is doing the work under the surface and behind the scenes.

Guided Prayer:

Lord, I hate the way of suffering. I look at the world and in my own life and see so much pain. While suffering is hard to endure, I thank you that you didn't shy away from pain, but you stepped into it through your life and death. Help me to do the same in trust that You will bring resurrection on the other side. Show me how to participate in the sufferings of others and seek Your Kingdom to come on this earth.

Amen.



Thank you

for trusting me with your journey into the soil.

If you'd like to take a step further or view
the Seeds of Hope painting series,
go to www.bettedickinson.com
or follow on IG @Bette_Dickinson



Bette Dickinson

About the Artist & Author

Bette Dickinson serves with InterVarsity as the Assistant Director of Spiritual Formation. As a prophetic artist, author, and speaker, Bette invites audiences to connect with God through metaphors and images of the spiritual journey.

Whatever subject matter she chooses, she seeks to unveil the eternal realm, allowing the viewer to ponder the unseen through her work. Her desire is to connect spiritual formation and mission by awakening the soul to beauty and wonder.

Dickinson received her Bachelor of Arts degree in 2008 from Western Michigan University and her Master of Divinity in 2011 from Grand Rapids Theological Seminary. She is also an ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America.
www.bettedickinson.com