



# *Seeds of Hope*

RETREAT OF SILENCE GUIDE II: OPENING



# Welcome to the Seeds of Hope Retreat of Silence Guide Part 2!

Last month, we discussed what it looks like to journey with Jesus into the soil of suffering. We took a closer look at how the Cross is the beginning of growth, and how God often works beneath the soil, beyond what we can see. If you missed it, you can get the guide [here](#).

Seeds are more or less water resistant, so in order for it to germinate, it must be cracked open by external conflict like forest fires and freezing and thawing temperatures. This is called scarification. Scarification is necessary in order to allow water in. When water gets in, the little seedling within grows, the water pressure builds up, and it breaks out of the shell. It finally begins to grow into what it was always meant to be.

Suffering may crack the shell of our souls, but God's living water seeps in through the cracks in lament. Lament is where we stare darkness in the face and say "this isn't the way it was supposed to be. This is ugly and broken and wrong. But Jesus is here in the midst of it, and I will turn to Him."

It's where we experience Jesus as the Emmanuel (God with us) in the darkness. It is here we receive the gifts of His presence, His healing, and His truth that seep in through the cracks.

When we allow Jesus' living water into our fractured shells, we swell and expand - becoming more than we were before we were broken. And little by little, we start to transform and outgrow the shell of our false selves. We leave the shell behind as we become something new. A new creation.

I invite you this month to practice lament regularly. This Retreat of Silence guide is meant to get you started by praying through a communal lament, Psalm 126. For additional material on lament, visit the LAMENT-REPENT-RECEIVE resource our Spiritual Foundations Leadership Team put together [here](#).

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](http://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 40 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.

## STEP 2

# Praying with Psalm 126



## *Psalm 126*

- 1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dreamed.
- 2 Our mouths were filled with laughter,  
our tongues with songs of joy.  
Then it was said among the nations,  
“The Lord has done great things for them.”
- 3 The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we are filled with joy.
  
- 4 Restore our fortunes, Lord,  
like streams in the Negev.
- 5 Those who sow with tears  
will reap with songs of joy.
- 6 Those who go out weeping,  
carrying seed to sow,  
will return with songs of joy,  
carrying sheaves with them.

### **Read Slowly and Gaze at the Image:**

What does the Holy Spirit want you to notice?

### **Background on the Text:**

Psalm 126 is a communal lament and is one of the Psalms of Ascent that were sung by the people of Israel along the long, hard road to Jerusalem. The context is after the people have returned from Babylonian exile, but amidst the reality that their city and nation is not what it once was.

This passage is book-ended on the one end with praise and celebration for where God has already been faithful in the past (vs 1-3) and ends with a promise for what He will do in the future (vs. 5-6).





## Remember the Already:

(Reread vs. 1-3)

Think back over your ministry and personal life. What are ways you've seen God at work in the past? When was your "mouth filled with laughter" and your tongue "with songs of joy?"

When could it have been said of you, "the Lord has done great things for you?" or "the Lord has done great things for your ministry?"

How have you seen Him come through before in your life that reminds you of His faithfulness? How has He provided for you? Consider making a list here:

## Imagine the Future Harvest:

(Reread vs. 5-6)

Consider the aspects of your personal life, ministry, and world where you have been sowing in tears. Name them.

Close your eyes and imagine what it might look like to "reap with songs of joy" on the other side of this season. Imagine you are holding sheaves from the harvest alongside your brothers and sisters in Christ.

What is the "harvest?" What does it look like, taste like, smell like, feel like in your hands? Who is there with you to celebrate? What is the song of joy you are singing? Write down (or draw!) some ideas of what you would see:

## STEP 3

# Sowing in the Not Yet

Restore our fortunes, Lord,  
like streams in the Negev.

PSALM 126:4

### Consider the Not Yet.

In the middle in verse 4 is a petition in the not yet. God has not yet answered their prayers. They are not yet reaping with songs of joy. Sandwiched between verses of praise and promise is a petition in verse 4 cast into the ground like the seed itself.

The Negev was a dry riverbed 11 months out of the year. There was little to no life in this dusty place most of the time. Many of us can relate to this. It's the space between the spring and autumn rains—the arid silence of the desert heat. The place where we must sow in the cracked ground and the only water available is our own tears.

But when the winter rains finally came in that twelfth month, it would become a raging river, transforming the desert into a lush, green landscape filled with life—a complete transformation.

The reality is that the seeds will lay dormant underground until the rain comes. We cannot control the transformation that happens within our ministries, world, or even our own hearts any more than we can control whether or not it rains.

So here we must find ourselves in the not yet—waiting and petitioning for God to intervene on behalf of the places we have sown in tears. Here, we are invited to stay faithful—to keep sowing in tears and laying ourselves down in trust to God.

And a beautiful exchange happens when we do. In due time, God brings the rain. He takes those little seeds and transforms them into life-giving, fruit-bearing plants and turns deserts into lush landscapes.

There is a promise in Psalm 126 that when we sow in tears, we will indeed reap with joy in the harvest, laughing with songs of joy. Let us begin now to petition Him to restore our fortunes like streams in the Negev so that we may one day reap with songs of joy.

# Prayer



He who sows in tears is the likeliest  
to have sheaves worth gathering.

MARCUS DODS

## Petition in the Not Yet:

Look deeply into the wasteland of your life or the lives of those around you and ask God to transform those situations into lush landscapes. Return to what you had envisioned reaping in the harvest (in step 2). What would need to happen for this dream to become a reality? Now ask God for it.

Sow your prayers in tears to Him. (see prayer below for guidance).

*Lord,*

*I look into this Negev desert and all I see is wasteland. All I see is emptiness and loss. But I trust that you can see life. Would you bring transformation to this desert landscape of my heart and the world around me and bring new life?*

*Would you bring the spring rains? (Name specifically what the world needs, your ministry need, and what you personally need). Is it a word of encouragement? A specific provision? Justice? Breakthrough? A promise to cling to? Ask Him to provide what you need.*

*Help me, Lord, to trust you for the way you want to provide and when. Help me to keep petitioning to you, sowing, and waiting for You in the in-between space of sowing and reaping.*

*Amen*



# Thank you

for trusting me with your journey into the soil.  
For additional material on this content or to view  
the Seeds of Hope painting series,  
go to [www.bettedickinson.com](http://www.bettedickinson.com)  
or follow on IG [@Bette Dickinson](https://www.instagram.com/Bette_Dickinson)

Also - see our LAMENT-REPENT-INTERCEDE material created by our Spiritual Foundations Leadership Team to help you in the process of lament [here](#).



## 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.  
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