



Personal Spiritual Retreat

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as? the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

-John 7:37-38, NIV

Acknowledgement

My comments below are often based on what I heard on audio from a [lecture by Annette Fergusson given at Regent College](#) as a part of the *Christian Thought and Culture I* class. The lecture, entitled *The Contemporary Christian and Spirituality*, was a guide for students who were encouraged to make a one-day retreat. I am indebted to her for her simple clarity and helpful concrete suggestions. The practice she recommends has helped to fill me again and again with peace and life from the never-lacking source that is Jesus our Lord.

Introduction - What is is?

The practice of Christian retreat has a long history in the Church. It is a decision to make space in one's life, setting aside everyday activities to seek the Lord in prayer. We follow the example of Jesus, who set aside times of retreat from the press of his ministry and other human beings. Consider [Mark 1:32-39](#), [Psalm 62:5-8](#), [Luke 5:16](#), and [Luke 6:12-13](#). Each of us comes to a retreat with differing needs. Your experience will not precisely mirror mine, or be the same each time.

"Spiritual disciplines aren't just enforced time with God, they're rewiring the circuitry of our brains, forming and shaping disciples."

- Rob Moll, *We Are Family*, Books & Culture, Nov/Dec 2011

I recommend from 3 to 4 hours up to one day done in such a way as to avoid the need for overnight preparation. Keep it simple and easy. Don't worry about food; fast for the duration of the retreat. (Perhaps take some water along.) I have nothing against more extended times of retreat. However, such times will require more calendar arranging and preparation. The practice I am recommending is intended to be simple and repeatable monthly or more often. Time with God is vital ([John 15:1-8](#)) if we are to bear much fruit.

Why a Retreat?

In our busy society, we face pressures at many levels. Setting aside a time for individual communion with God is a necessity. It is how we are designed to *live*. As we take time for intentional prayer and meditation alone, we come to see ourselves in the light of the Holy Spirit. With an attitude of openness to what the Spirit may do in us, we allow God to change us. He forgives, redeems, and encourages. He transforms us as we are drawn into a deeper



relationship with him.

Getting Started

We come to God bringing everything we are and everything we are experiencing. We meet him heart, soul, mind, and body using all of our senses.

1. Find a place where to be alone. I prefer natural settings outdoors. You will discover what works best for you. Experiment as necessary with location. Below is a list of some local places that I like. Others may choose a quiet room or indoor setting free from distraction and association with everyday life: a room in a church building or a friend's home might do well. I find it helpful to walk a few miles (an hour or so) before settling down for the actual retreat. I process thoughts and clear my mind. There is something settling about walking quietly.
2. Choose to be alone for your retreat. Solitude is a learned spiritual practice.
3. Turn off your phone and other means of being contacted.
4. Keep a notepad or journal available. Write down distractions, things you forgot that need doing, observations, thoughts you want to remember, whatever seems helpful. It can be helpful to write out prayer or reflections. Others use a notepad as a place to store things that will steal your attention from the retreat when they come to mind, attempting to draw you back to your everyday activity.
5. You may find it helpful to use something to focus your attention on your purpose to spend time with God. I usually keep a Bible in sight. Others use a cross. Find a way to keep yourself focused.
6. Fill your time during the retreat with thanksgiving. Begin with prayer. Ask for grace anticipating in a prayer of trust what God is going to do with your time together. Ask for his blessing and protection on this time. Express your desire to know him and his ways and purposes more deeply and clearly. Make yourself available to him. Think Romans 12:1-2.
7. Start with a time of quiet worship. The form of your worship will vary from person to person and time to time. The idea of worship is to speak out verbally or mentally your praise to God, to dwell on his glory and express your recognition of who He is. Honor his name. The following scripture passages are good sources of worship thoughts and words: Psalms 9, 18, 19, 23, 24, 29, 30-34, 65, 66, 89, 92, 100, 103-105, 107, 111, 113, 117, 118, 134-136, 145-150, 2 Samuel 22

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina (divine reading) is a way of reading scripture that promotes communion with God and internalizing the teaching of scripture. There are other forms of Bible study for other occasions; this form is good for retreat.

- *Reading:* Choose a passage from Scripture that you will meditate on. I find it helpful to choose in advance of the retreat, but allow God to guide you. (Below are some possible passages if you would find this helpful.) Keep in mind that it is content rather than volume that matters. Read slowly, allowing the words of the text to speak to you. Pay



attention to the Spirit as you read. When a word or phrase captures your attention, stop and reread it. Write it down if that helps.

- *Meditation*: Enter into the Scripture you have read so that you become a participant rather than an observer. Allow the scripture to speak into your own life.
- *Prayer*: Consider your feelings and thoughts as you have read and meditated and express them in prayer to God. Be honest with him and tell him what you are thinking, even if you are in doubt or do not understand or have feelings that you find uncomfortable. (He knows, anyway.) There is benefit in just opening up your heart to God to share thoughts, feelings, and even fears. (Like the Psalmists...) When you have emptied yourself of these things, it may be time to move on to contemplation.
- *Contemplation*: Sit quietly and enjoy the presence of the Lord. Do not rush this time. Practice his presence; He is with you, so focus your awareness on Him. Seek intimacy with God. Listen. Enjoy your surroundings without losing focus on God and the passage and your thoughts. What God has made declares his glory.

After the time in scripture, it may suit God's purposes for this time to study or read something else, or prepare a lesson, or write. I sometimes find this time profitable for planning future teaching, preaching, writing, or for other activities requiring thoughtful preparation. But these fruits are the bonuses of retreat, not a "goal" for the retreat. Accept what God offers, whether it is quiet enjoyment, insights, ideas, conviction, or whatever.

Prayer of Thanksgiving.

Close with a prayer in which you thank God for whatever he has brought to this time. The reality of God's presence empowers us to re-enter everyday life to overflow with the life He gives us. This extended time of retreat can prepare the way for shorter times of daily devotion that incorporate pieces of what we experience in retreat. We are anchored by the time we spend with Him.

A Prayer Partner or Coach

I suggest that you work with a prayer partner or coach *before* and *after* your personal spiritual retreat. It will help you to stay focused and accountable. Your prayer partner or coach can encourage you and help you process the things God reveals when you are with him. Share what God is doing in your life, and where he is leading. Pray together for the retreat and an aftermath of overflowing life.

Scripture for Lectio Divina

Here are some possible scriptures to get started in the Lectio Divina portion of retreat. Some of these passages may be too long for one study time. Choose a short enough section of scripture that you can get your mind around it at one time. It may be helpful to do some contextual study and word study to prepare in advance for Lectio Divina. The richer your knowledge of the content of the scripture, the more God can speak to you through it.

- Genesis 1, 2, 3, 15



- Isaiah 6, 11 and others
- Sections of Ezekiel
- Psalm 139
- 2 Corinthians 2:14 to 6:2. Chapter 3 is a favorite of mine.
- Ephesians 2, 3, 4:1 to 5:20
- Galatians 3:1 to 4:7
- Galatians 5 and 6
- Hebrews 10 and 12
- Matthew 5-7 (the Sermon on the Mount, including the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer)
- parables often make a good study
- Revelation 21 and 22

Places for Personal Spiritual Retreat

I try to pick easily accessible outdoor locations that do not require a long drive. So I will focus on that sort of place in and near Long Beach. Here are a few possibilities. Experiment and find spots that work for you. Suggestions are welcome.

- [South Coast Botanic Gardens](#) is probably my favorite. There is an admission charge of \$7 or \$30/year. There are some remote sites in the gardens where you will rarely be disturbed.
- [El Dorado Nature Center](#) is a good location, but all trails can be busy with walkers. I see others doing retreat-like things here. There is a charge for driving into the parking area, but no admission fee.
- [Hopkins Wilderness Park](#) often has some places where you can be alone.
- [Hilltop Park](#) in Signal Hill is a good place to pray over the city. It is somewhat busy for retreat purposes.
- [Rancho Los Cerritos](#) and [Rancho Los Alamitos](#) have nice garden areas.
- There are several city parks where you can find a shady, secluded picnic table at which to sit. Here are a few that have worked: [Stearns Park](#), [El Dorado Park](#), [Heartwell Park](#)
- [Deane Dana Friendship Park in San Pedro](#) has become one of my favorite places for the walking portion of retreat. There is only one large set of picnic tables at the edge of the park at which to sit after walking. Shade is practically non-existent; so this is a park I use in the winter only. It is possible to walk from the southwest corner of the park all the way down to the ocean through Shoreline Park and then to the trails along the Trump National Golf Club and Dog Beach in Palos Verdes, which is another good winter retreat spot. There is also parking for this public area at the golf club.

You can download a copy of this post as a document [here](#).

You can also download the slides from a sermon on spiritual retreat I gave on June 10, 2012. A PDF of the sermon slides is at [here](#). The sermon audio is available [here as an MP3](#) and the Powerpoint slides [here](#).