

"Spiritual disciplines are means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up.

It means somewhere you're not occupied and you're certainly not preoccupied.

*It means to create that space in which something can happen
that you hadn't planned on or counted on."*

HENRI NOUWEN

RETREAT

Desire	to pull back from daily life and spend extended time with God
Definition	Retreats are specific and regular times apart for quietly listening to God and delighting in his company. Retreats remove us from the daily battle into times of refreshing, retooling, renewing and unwinding.
Scripture	<p>"Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'" (Mark 6:31)</p> <p>"Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)</p> <p>"Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near." (Zephaniah 1:7)</p> <p>"He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul." (Psalm 23:2-3)</p>
Practice Includes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• having short times as well as extended times away with God• detaching from productivity and doing in order to be in the presence of God and attend to his voice alone• having longer retreats of two to forty days• spending time in a hermitage• spending one day a month at a retreat site for time with God• having seasonal retreats for rest and renewal• withdrawing from life in order to see where your soul is in danger, to seek God's help in reengaging in the battle
God-Given Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• in the company of Jesus, being able to quiet the noise inside and out• making space in your hectic schedule for the Lover of your soul• developing the ability to hear the still, small voice of God• freedom from the need to be seen and to produce• resting in God• gaining perspective on God's work and ways in your soul• ability to <i>be</i>, not just <i>do</i>

RETREAT

IN EPHESIANS 6:12 PAUL describes the spiritual life as a struggle “not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” The early church and desert fathers paid close attention to the dangerous battle for the soul. John Cassian writes at the end of the fourth century in his *Conferences*:

But you must know that our battles are not all fought in the same order, because, as we mentioned that the attacks are not always made on us in the same way, each one of us ought also to begin the battle with due regard to the character of the attack which is especially made on him so that one man will have to fight his first battle against the fault which stands third on the list, another against that which is fourth or fifth.

Historically one way Christians persevered in the battle was to regularly retreat from the front lines of attack and spend solitary time with God. Times of retreat brought perspective to the mind while strengthening and nourishing the soul. Without retreat, followers of Jesus tired and became ineffective in the struggle. They needed to be alone with God and apart from others if they wanted to reengage the battle on different ground.

The tradition of retreating was still in good stead in the fifteenth century. At that time Europe had thirteen hundred Franciscan hermitages. But as the modern era has gained speed the habit of retreating has fallen out of the practice of many believers.

Rather than going on retreats that slow us down to listen and focus on God alone, we go on “retreats” filled with lectures, late nights, constant activity and interaction with all kinds of people. This sort of retreating is not a bad thing. It is simply not a retreat from the busyness and distractions of life. It is not time set apart with God alone.

Retreating, in the traditional sense, is not about gaining more information. It is not getting away to get things done. It is not a way to catch up on our reading or email. Retreats are ways we pull back from the battle and rest. We take naps and go to bed early. In the presence of the Holy One we enter into the silence and solitude and rest in God. Resting gives us the energy it takes to build our relationship with God one on one. When we are rested, we listen better. When we are rested, we notice desires as well as what lies buried in our souls.

We may feel that nothing really big or noteworthy happened on our retreat. The benefits

of retreating often are not seen until we engage the battle again. Go away and trust God with what happens in your soul.

Retreat centers can be found in all parts of the country. Some retreat centers offer spiritual direction to their guests. If you would like the guidance of a spiritual director, check out this possibility while you are on retreat.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What makes it difficult for you to get away with God?
2. Can you describe your desire to get away alone with God?
What is your soul aching for?
3. When you go on a retreat, what do you tend to do?
4. How does simply *being* with God sound to you?
5. How do *doing* and *being* fit together in your spiritual journey?
6. How might retreating with God address some dangers that surround your soul?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Find a retreat center near you and spend a day away with God. (Check the web or Yellow Pages. Call a Catholic church and ask where they go on retreat.) Take a Bible and no other reading material. Take a journal along if journaling appeals to you. Enter the quietness. Rest into God. Sleep. Attend to Scripture. Do not hurry. Listen.
2. If you don't want to go to a retreat center, plan a day outside or in some other quiet setting where you can spend time with the Lord. Take only your Bible with you. • When your day is over, bring some small memento (a rock, a twig, a photograph) of your time with God. Let your retreat object remind you of your time with God.
3. Once a month or once a season set aside a day for retreat. Reflect on how you have seen God's presence in your life since your last retreat. How has God been with you? • How have you grown to love him? • Has God nudged you into some particular discussion about this time?
4. Celebrate your birthday by making a retreat. Spend some quality time with the God who made you and called you into being alive right now. • What is it like for you to know your time here on earth was appointed? That you are here with a purpose and a mission? • Listen. What is God telling you about your life and your calling for the next year?
5. As you become comfortable with silent retreats, consider taking an extended silent retreat. Many retreat centers are set up to have guests for eight- to forty-day retreats.

RESOURCES ON RETREAT

A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants by Reuben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck
On Retreat with Thomas Merton: A Seven-Day Spiritual Journey by Esther de Waal
Quiet Places or Still Waters by Jane Rubietta