



SILENCIO

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PERSONAL RETREAT

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Driving into the retreat center for my first silent retreat made me quite anxious. What does one “do” during this time? My comfort zone was exegesis, head knowledge, writing and deadlines. I was not altogether sure what this experience would entail. I had spent a whole hour in silence before, but 36 hours? What had I gotten myself into?

Upon gathering with a dozen men and women, I noticed some who appeared to be anxious like me, while others seemingly couldn't wait to dive into their own quietness. As we were dismissed I ventured into my room and my journey of silence, listening to God's voice, and reflecting on my rushed and chaotic life began.

That was years ago. I've since learned that silent retreats take practice. Later, as I began leading silent retreats, I could easily spot those who felt unsettled and anxious, wondering if they would hear from God, unsure about how to spend their time, and yet encompassed with the desire to experience deep communion with Jesus. It brought a smile to my face as I knew exactly how that felt as well as the joy they would experience in an encounter that only God could orchestrate.

What is it that tugs our souls toward silence with God but then fears what will happen when we get there? What do we expect to experience? At first I came prepared for boredom loaded down with various books. Years later I need nothing but my Bible and journal. Silence. Recognizing God's voice. Reflection. Confession. Praise. Enjoying my sacred pathways in nature. Resting in his arms. Feeling loved beyond understanding.

We come into a silent retreat seeking God's face. This spacious time offers the gift of a deeper knowledge of God and ourselves in light of his Word. We come to ask

for guidance and spiritual discernment, God's wisdom and council in times of uncertainty. We come into God's presence to rest. To climb up into his lap to be loved and restored. We come to praise God for his presence in desolation and consolation. We come to perhaps listen to music that connects our soul to his love, to hear the sounds of his creation and receive restorative rest in the quietness of our surroundings.

A personal retreat offers us two special gifts: silence and a radically simplified environment. Stepping away from all the chaotic stimuli of life invites simplicity and clarity. And entering into silence leaves us open and vulnerable. The retreat environment provides this. It is a powerful experience to spend time in a place where prayers have previously soaked the walls and graced the beauty.

Are silence and simplicity the sum and total purpose of a retreat? Surely not! God calls us to be restored, spend time with him, confess our sins and ask for guidance with areas of our life that need his help and direction. The challenge is to enter quietness and stillness long enough to hear what God wants to share with us.

These days as I enter the driveway of my favorite retreat house, I feel busyness, chaos, and anxiety slip away. Silence and simplicity greet me like old friends and accompany me into God's loving presence.

“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” – Mark 6:31 (NIV)

“I have found real value in thinking of retreat as the quiet in-the-moment seizing of opportunities occasioned by unexpected intrusions of God's Spirit.” – Larry Crabb

TAKE TIME TO BE HOLY

WILLIAM D. LONGSTAFF, 1882

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord; Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word. Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak, Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.	Take time to be holy, the world rushes on; Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone. By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be; Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.	Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide; And run not before Him, whatever betide. In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord, And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.	Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul, Each thought and each motive beneath His control. Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love, Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.
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SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

- Take a walk and transition yourself from the busyness of life into a more relaxed, quiet, attentive and refreshing mindset.
- Find a quiet place to be alone. Read Psalm 139. As this Scripture leads you into opening up to God, surrender your time and in stillness listen for his voice.
- Try this “Palms down; Palms up” releasing prayer. In recognizing the issues that might be pressing in on you, place your palms down on your knees and list the many concerns. Offer them up to God by turning your palms up. Release those to him while being open and receptive to issues that God might bring to your attention.
- Are you in need of rest? You might practice the art of the retreat nap - yes, this is allowed!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Ask yourself “what do I need from God right now”? Perhaps the answer is rest, or love, or direction, or simply being spiritually restored or basking in God's Word and presence and listening for his tender voice.
- Upon hearing or sensing what is best for you at this time, you might journal your thoughts as a way of exploring what God is saying to you. What is God inviting you to notice in this spacious day together?
- Upon the conclusion of your retreat, what is the “take away” for you? You might focus on your loved ones, daily responsibilities and current life circumstances. Ask God to give you a heart of acceptance, joy, patience and an extra measure of love for the place in life to which he has called you.

A Prayer of Illumination:

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:17-19)

SUGGESTED SPIRITUAL FORMATION RESOURCES

Learning to Hear God: A Personal Retreat Guide; Jan Johnson
Time Away: A Guide to Personal Retreat; Ben Campbell Johnson, Paul H.Lang
Ready-to-Use Downloadable Personal Retreat Guides (www.leadershiptransformations.org/ltistore/Retreat-Guides)



Suggested Spiritual Formation Resources are available online at www.spiritualformationstore.com