

## **WHAT IS A PERSONAL PRAYER RETREAT?**

Prayer Retreat: A time you set aside to go away to be alone with God. Let's examine this definition, a phrase at a time.

### **A time you set aside . . .**

A personal prayer retreat must be a time that you set aside. We are all so incredibly busy, it is easy to be trapped into doing the urgent rather than the important. Is there any time more important than the time you could spend alone with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords? We believe that personal prayer retreats are the most important things to schedule and invest your time in. If you don't set it aside, you simply will not have a personal prayer retreat. Other responsibilities will suck up all your time. Satan wants to keep you from enjoying this sweet fellowship with God. He loves for you fill your schedule with everything but a block of time to experience the Lord.

### **. . . to go away . . .**

Make sure that you *go away* for your personal prayer retreat. Trying to "retreat" at home or at the office will be frustrating. There are too many distractions in these places. We need to go away in order to focus on being with the Lord.

We live down in the valley—the valley of our everyday lives, where it's too noisy to hear God very well. In the valley we have too much to do, too many people to talk with, too many problems, too much time pressure.

We need to leave this valley of noise and pressure, and get away to the quiet of God's presence.

### **. . . to be alone with God.**

This is the essence of a prayer retreat... to be alone with God. In the intimacy of fellowship, your relationship with the Lord will be renewed. You will experience *Him*. And then you'll ask Him what He wants to do

in your personal life, in your family, and in your ministry. Usually, I find that God wants to work in all three areas during most prayer retreats.

So get alone with God and let him reveal what he wants to share with you.

## **TWELVE STEPS TO AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER RETREAT Step 1: Go to your Retreat Site and Rest.**

The location of your retreat is a matter of personal preference. The real issue is to *go away* to be with the Lord.

“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 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.’ So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place”

(Mark 6:30-32).

### **Step 2: Pray for your retreat.**

James 1:5 is one of our most precious Bible promises.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

### **Step 3: Plan your retreat.**

Proverbs [14:22] promises that those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness. So lay out, step by step, what you need to be in prayerful planning about during your retreat time. The numbers of issues that you have to resolve will affect how much time you have for other steps.

### **Step 4: Repent of your sins.**

We believe it isn't possible to receive guidance from God or to enjoy His fellowship, unless you first repent of your sins and receive His cleansing.

Jesus said, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:19, 20).

We often use v. 20 as a salvation verse, but it speaks more directly to Christ's desire for fellowship with the believer. He is knocking on the door of your heart. Repenting of your sins assures He will enter the door of intimate fellowship with you, ready to communicate and guide.

#### **Step 5: Thankfully review how God has been working.**

You'll want to think back, and take an inventory of the many ways God has been blessing your life. When you look back over the last few months of your life, it is then more possible to see how God is working.

Giving thanks for what He is doing can lead to insight about what the next steps might be, as He leads you in the future.

#### **Step 6: Submit to God's plans for you.**

As we prepare to write down our issues and questions and problems, we may already be thinking about how we would like them to turn out. Proverbs 19:21 counsels us, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD'S purpose that prevails."

To realize God's best for our lives and ministries, we must want and be willing to submit to His plans.

#### **Step 7: Devour the Word of God and take notes.**

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path,"* promises Ps. 119:105.

Ask God to guide you into the right books of the Bible to read for your retreat. **Then read and read and read some more.** Jot down notes about specific verses or thoughts that you have while reading the Bible. Often God will bring verses back to you during your listening time.

**Step 8: Write down your specific issues and questions.**

What are the specific issues and questions that you really need to hear from God about? When King David was confronted by a Philistine threat, he inquired of God using two specific questions: "Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?" The LORD answered him, "Go, I will hand them over to you." So David and his men proceeded into combat, and God brought about a magnificent victory. The Hebrew name for the place of victory, *Baal Parazim*, means God "broke out" against the enemies (cf. 1 Chronicles 14:10-12).

What a great example! King David asked the Lord two specific questions, and the Lord answered each one specifically. David acted on this guidance and won the battle.

Do you want God to "break out" in your life and in your ministry? Take your specific questions and issues to God....and listen!!!

For prayer retreats, we suggest splitting issues and questions into three categories: personal, family, and ministry.

[Give some sample questions and issues that you may consider for a prayer retreat:]

**Step 9: Meet with God in a quiet place. Listen and take notes.**

Consider Elijah, who was discouraged, and needed guidance from God. He found his quiet place in a cave (1 Kings 19:9-13). The Lord instructed him to stand outside the cave, and wait for the Lord to pass by. First came a great wind, followed by an earthquake, and then a fire. But the Lord was not in any of these earth-shattering forces of nature. Finally, the Lord spoke in a gentle whisper.

A good prayer is, “Lord, this time is your time. If it pleases you to communicate with me, please do. I am open to you. I pray that you will give me guidance concerning those questions and issues that I’ve written down. Most of all, I want your will. I want to hear from you about any issue or question that you want to communicate with me about. In Christ’s name. Amen.”

### **Step 10: Prayerfully respond in writing to your questions and issues.**

Look to match the thoughts from meeting with God in a quiet place with the issues and questions you have recorded. There will probably be many issues and questions for which there is no specific guidance. Take time to specifically think about these issues and questions, and record your thoughts as before. If you have been prepared by God through this process for consecrated thinking, you should be able to think and plan clearly during your prayer retreats.

### **Step 11: Receive Counsel from wise, godly people.**

There are pitfalls when you try to listen to God. You could be wrong. Even after repentance and submission, your motives could be wrong. You could be hearing what you want to hear. You could have had a bad dinner the night before.

The Lord gives us his sobering perspective on lying prophets:

*I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, ‘I had a dream! I had a dream!’ How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? . . . I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, ‘The LORD declares.’ Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams . . . They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least,” declares the LORD (Jeremiah 23:25, 31, 32).*

Counsel from wise godly people is a solution to this pitfall. “*Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.*” (Proverbs 15:22).

### **Step 12: Plan to communicate your thoughts and delegate tasks**

As you consider your thoughts and decisions, ask yourself, who needs to know? To whom do I need to communicate these thoughts? Family members? Church leaders? Friends?

How do you need to communicate these thoughts and decisions? And as a Christian leader, to whom do you need to delegate the tasks that emerged from your retreat?

Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, taught a great lesson in delegation in Exodus 18. His point? We wear ourselves out if we try to do everything ourselves. We need to get organized and entrust ministry to reliable people.

So plan your communication and delegation. Who needs to do what? How will you communicate this to them?

**CHALLENGE:** When will you plan your prayer retreat?