



PRAYER RETREAT GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to your personal prayer retreat! This is a time to practice the pattern we see in Jesus' life, where he would get away from distractions and demands in order to spend extended time alone with God the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). This guide is designed to help you spend between extended time alone with God, resting in His abundant grace and reflecting on His Word and work in your life. You might be thinking, "But I have so much that I need to get done!" And you're right. But if you're anxious about all the things on your to-do list, take a moment to consider these passages:

- Mark 1:32-37 That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you."
- Luke 10:38-42: Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."
- Exodus 34:21-24: Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. Even in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.

In your own words, what might God be showing you from these passages about priorities and productivity? Take some time to think about that and then dive in and enjoy this "mini-retreat" with God!

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Guess what? God is with you right now. In this moment. He knows everything about you. He knows everything happening in your life. He knows everything happening in your heart. He knows what's worrying you. He knows what's tempting you. He knows what's frustrating you. He knows you. And, right now, in this moment, He loves you. He is glad to be here with you. He has been looking forward to spending this time with you today because He delights in you, He wants to hear from you, and He has some things He wants to share with you. So, as you begin this time with Him, it's important to remember who He is: Almighty God and Gracious Redeemer. But it's just as important to remember who you are in His eyes.

So, read these verses (or whatever verses remind you of God's love for you in Christ). Personalize them. And thank God for what they reveal about your relationship with Him.

- Romans 8:15-17: The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.
- Romans 8:28-39: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- John 15:15: I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.
- Psalm 139:1-18: O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.

STOP

Our souls are a lot like boats. When you turn off the engine on a boat, it doesn't stop moving immediately. It takes time to decelerate and come to a complete stop. My guess is your soul is still moving as you're reading this. In his book *The Imperfect Pastor*, Zach Eswine describes the struggle we often face in prayer:

"Over the first several minutes my mind isn't silent. The thoughts and feelings that have gone unnoticed amid the chatter of the day seize their moment and rise loudly to the surface as I try to quiet down. The first round of these thoughts is like foam on a soda or cream on milk. We clear it away to get to what lies beneath. So, I take each thought that vies for my attention, no matter what it is, how silly or terrible, how ordinary or task oriented, how biblically inaccurate or theologically sound, and turn it into prayer, saying of each one, "I hear myself thinking this thing, Lord, and I bring it to you. I leave it with you."...It matters to know that often after the froth clearing and before the deep drinking in prayerful aloneness with God, boredom, restless mind, feelings of wasted time, and anxious fear all collaborate into a gang and try to loot us. They mosquito-bite us, and we want to get up, blow out the candle, and do anything but this. Instead, I invite you to hold on...Let's face our tantrumming or clinging souls..."

Your mind will likely be flooded with all kinds of distractions and you'll think of all kinds of reasons to check your email (just one last time), refresh Instagram, send a quick text. Resist that urge. Turn off your phone. Sit in silence for a few minutes, even if you need to set a 3-5minute timer. You don't need to do anything, pray anything, think about anything or say anything. Just let your soul slow down like your body has. Breathe. Remind yourself that you are in the presence of your heavenly Father who loves you. If you remember something important you need to do, write it down and set it aside for now. Remember, God is with you and this is time devoted to being with Him. So just sit. Close your eyes. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you calm your soul (Psalm 131).

You can use the rest of this retreat time however you want. But below are three movements to consider including in your time with the Lord today.

LOOK UP

Take time to rejoice in God's character and reflect on God's Word. Spend time praising Him through singing, listening to worship music, or in prayer. The goal is to stir your affections for God and express your joy and trust in Him. This time should also include reading and reflecting on Scripture. Whether it's intensive Bible study or more devotional reading, remember that this time in God's Word should be relational, hearing from God and enjoying intimacy with Him, not just intellectual. See "Additional Resources" for various ways to reflect on God's Word. You could also spend time reading a good Christian book that helps you process biblical truths about a particular topic.

LOOK IN

Often, we can be so caught up in what's going on around us that we neglect what's going on inside of us. We hurry through life with so many unprocessed emotions and experiences and so many unexamined habits and choices. And when we neglect that prayerful self-reflection, we miss some of the deeper work God wants to do in us and the wisdom He wants to give us. We need to invite the Holy Spirit to search and reveal our hearts (Psalm 139:23-24) and we need to take time to consider our ways (Haggai 1:5).

Here are some self-reflection questions you can use during this time. Some people find it helpful to journal their answers so that they can come back to them later. But it might be better for you to get outside and reflect while you go for a walk. Whatever works best for you. And don't feel pressure to go through all of them. These are just suggestions to get you started.

- How am I doing?
- How have I been feeling emotionally and why?
- How have I been feeling physically and why?
- What have been my predominate thoughts and feelings toward God lately and why?
- What have been my predominate thoughts and feelings toward the people in my life and why?
- What has been happening in my life and how is it affecting me?
- If I could describe what God has been doing in my life over this past month/quarter/year in one word or movie title, what would it be and why?
- Are there any changes I need to make?
- Are there any pending decisions I need to process?

LOOK OUT

Praying for others is an incredible privilege. Think about it. In God's mysterious design, your prayers can literally affect another person's circumstances and even their hearts! We know that God is the One who does the work. After all, we're praying to Him. But He has chosen to work through our prayers. So let's pray bold prayers as we intercede for the people God brings to mind.

But let's also pray prayers of thanksgiving for the goodness of God we already observe in the lives of others. The apostle Paul was constantly overjoyed as he thought about and thanked God for evidences of grace in the lives of the people around him. So let's pray both kinds of prayer as God brings people to mind: intercession and thanksgiving.

- Pray for people you know.
- Pray for our church.
- Pray for an unreached people group.
- The Joshua Project [Unreached of the Day app](#) is a helpful resource that you can download.