

HALF DAY RETREAT TOOL

Purpose

A personal retreat creates sacred space for rest, reflection, and renewal with God. This is not work or a task to complete but an intentional pause to slow down, listen to the Holy Spirit, and recalibrate your life and ministry. Regular retreats help you work on your life rather than just in your life

Before You Begin

1. **SCHEDULE IT:** Block a half-day (4-5 hours) in your calendar each month. Treat this appointment with God as seriously as any other commitment. Consistent rhythm matters more than perfect conditions.
2. **CHOOSE YOUR SPACE:** Find an environment that fits your needs. Do you think better with structure or freedom? Indoors or outdoors? Close to home or far away? With some people around or in complete solitude? There's no right answer, just what helps you connect with God.
3. **PREPARE YOURSELF:** Get enough sleep the night before. Eat a good breakfast. Don't bring the stress of an overbooked week into your retreat time. You can't hear God clearly when you're running on fumes.
4. **DISCONNECT FROM TECHNOLOGY:** Set away messages and turn on "do not disturb." The emails and texts will be there when you return. Your soul needs this uninterrupted time more than your inbox needs your attention.
5. **SELECT YOUR FOCUS:** Choose one of the eight retreat options below. Don't try to do everything in one retreat. Let the Spirit guide you toward what you need most in this season.

What This Retreat Is NOT

- It's not work. Leave your to-do list at the office.
- It's not a Bible study marathon. The goal isn't to get through material but to hear from God.
- It's not one-sided. Healthy relationships involve talking and listening. So does your time with God.
- It's not catch-up time. The piles on your desk will still be there, and you'll handle them better when you return refreshed.

8 CREATIVE HALF-DAY RETREAT IDEAS

1. Bible Study Retreat

This retreat centers on deeply engaging one passage of Scripture, moving beyond information to transformation.

Read

Read the passage several times slowly. Walk through the scene in your imagination. Invite the Holy Spirit to enliven what you're reading. Put yourself in the passage as a character or observer. What do you see, hear, smell, feel? Imagine the scene from every angle.

Pray

Enter into conversation with God about what you saw and experienced. Talk with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ask questions. Share observations. Voice your insights. This isn't a formal prayer, it's a dialogue with someone who loves you.

Journal

Write down what you saw in the text, what God revealed in your conversation, and what you should do with what you learned. Be specific about next steps.

Walk with Jesus

Whatever else you do with your time (walk, workout, fish, sit quietly), do it with Jesus. Include him in everything like an ongoing dialogue. Talk some. Listen more. Enjoy being with him like you would a close friend on a weekend getaway.

Additional Option:

Use Lectio Divina ("divine reading"). This ancient method guides you through scripture in four movements: read, meditate, pray, contemplate. Find guided Lectio Divina resources at soulshepherding.org.

Before you leave, plan your Bible engagement for the upcoming month. What book will you read? What study will you start? What plan will you follow?

2. Personal Planning Retreat

This retreat helps you align your compass (vision and values) with your clock (appointments and activities). You'll step back from the daily grind to think about the big picture.

Start with Prayer

Recalibrate with God about your personal life and ministry. Use your calendar as a prayer tool. Pray through the highs and lows of the past month. Pray for opportunities and challenges in the coming month. Journal what you hear.

Review and Preview

Look back at the month that just ended. Look ahead at what's coming. Pull out your personal and ministry goals. Ask God to refine them and show you which ones need attention this month. Schedule upcoming ministry and family opportunities.

Ask Big-Picture Questions

What is our mission? What's my role in it? What are the top few things only I can do or am responsible to do? Am I doing enough of those things? What's already coming in the next 30 days that needs my attention? What can I proactively do to move the mission forward?

Create Prayer Requests

Based on your review, write specific prayer requests to share with your spouse, small group, or prayer partners.

Remaining Time

Rest in what God has shown you. Take a walk. Sit quietly. Let the insights settle.

3. Prayer and Silence Retreat

This retreat prioritizes listening over talking. You'll create space for God to speak into the noise and busyness of life.

Choose One Focus

Don't try to pray through every method. Pick one prayer practice and go deep. Options include: praying Scripture, praying through your calendar, intercession for specific people, listening prayer, prayers of gratitude, prayers of lament, or simply sitting in silence.

Embrace Silence

Silence feels uncomfortable at first. Your mind will wander. That's normal. Gently bring your attention back to God's presence. The goal isn't to empty your mind but to focus your heart on God.

Journal What You Hear

When God speaks (through Scripture, impressions, memories, or thoughts), write it down. Don't critique or edit in the moment, just capture what comes.

Worship Music (Optional)

Consider using worship music to bookend your prayer time, but spend most of your retreat in silence. These quiet moments create space for you to connect the dots between what you lack and what you need.

4. Personal Reflection Retreat

This retreat invites honest self-examination. You'll bring your journal and write through questions that reveal the true condition of your soul.

Bring Only a Journal

Find a comfortable spot. Open your journal. Ask God to give you honest eyes to see yourself. Then write through these questions:

- What is the current state of my soul?
- Where is my walk with God thriving? Where is it struggling?
- What are my hopes and hurts right now?
- What were my monthly highs and lows?
- Where is the beautiful and where is the brutal in my life?
- What should I celebrate? What challenges am I facing?
- What is the next step for me spiritually? With my family? In my ministry?

Write Freely

Don't edit yourself. No one else will read this unless you choose to share it. Let the words flow. Some retreats you'll write pages. Others you'll write a few paragraphs. Both are good.

Pray Through What You've Written

After you've written, talk to God about what showed up on the page. What patterns do you see? What does God want you to know? What does he want you to do

5. Personal Evaluation Retreat

This retreat uses specific diagnostic questions to assess your spiritual health and leadership capacity. You'll identify areas of strength and areas needing attention.

Work Through These Questions

Take time with each one. Write your honest answers. Rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 if that helps clarify where you stand.

- Is my calling sure?
- Is my vision clear?
- Is my passion hot?
- Is my character submitted?
- Is my pride subdued?
- Are my fears at bay?
- Is my pace sustainable?
- Are my physical and spiritual practices healthy?
- Are my ears open to the whispers of the Spirit?
- Are my gifts developing?
- Is my heart for God increasing?
- Is my capacity for loving deepening?

Identify Patterns

Which questions surfaced resistance or discomfort? Which ones made you smile? The questions that provoke the strongest reaction often reveal what God wants to address.

Create an Action Plan

Pick one or two areas where you need to grow. What's one specific thing you can do in the next 30 days to move toward health in that area? Write it down. Tell someone about it.

6. Creative Retreat

This retreat engages your hands and imagination. You'll create something as a form of worship and reflection, allowing your mind to rest while your creativity flows.

Choose Your Medium

Bring a musical instrument. Write a song. Write a poem. Write a short story. Do woodworking. Paint. Sketch. The activity should engage you without mentally exhausting you.

Let Your Mind Wander

Don't make the creative work too demanding. You're not trying to produce a masterpiece. You're creating space for your mind to linger on what God might be saying.

Create as Worship

Whatever you make, offer it back to God. Let the act of creating be an act of worship. Some of the most profound spiritual insights come when our hands are busy and our hearts are open.

7. Reading Retreat

This retreat uses books and articles to stimulate spiritual reflection. You'll read slowly, pausing often to let truth sink deep.

Choose Light, Meditative Reading

Bring favorite articles that helped you in the past. Bring books where God spoke to you before. Reread the underlined parts. Don't bring a page-turner that will consume your attention completely.

Read Devotionally, Not Academically

The goal isn't to finish a book. It's to hear from God through what you read. Read a paragraph or two, then stop. Think about it. Pray about it. Write about it. Then read some more.

Use Classic Christian Writings

Excerpts from great Christians throughout history work well because you can read a short section and pause to reflect without feeling pressure to finish a whole book.

8. Rest and Restoration Retreat

This retreat acknowledges that sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is rest. You'll give your body and mind the break they desperately need.

Permission to Rest

Take a nap. Sometimes sleep is the most spiritual thing you can do. Your body is not a machine. It needs rest to function well.

Do Something Active (If You Need It)

If sitting still all day sounds miserable, go for a walk. Hike. Swim. Do some exercise. Move your body in ways that feel life-giving, not draining.

Porch-Sitting

Find a spot with a great view. Sit there with something to drink and an empty notebook. You don't have to write anything, but if you want to, you're ready. Think about nothing in particular. Let your mind rest.

Listen to a Podcast or Sermon

If listening helps you process, bring along a podcast or sermon. Take notes if you want, or don't. Let it wash over you without pressure to do anything with it.

Worship Music and Silence

Play some worship music, but leave lots of room for silence. These quiet in-between moments create space to connect the dots between what you lack and what you need. They create room to hear from God.

After Your Retreat

Don't rush back into the noise. Take a few minutes to write down the one or two most important things God spoke to you. Identify one specific action you'll take in the next week based on what you learned. Share your experience with someone who will encourage you to keep this rhythm going.

The retreat isn't the destination. It's the refueling station that makes the journey sustainable.