



*Understanding the Nature of a
Silent Retreat*

**NEWWIM**
network of evangelical women in ministry



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Jesus Leads Us into Silence and Solitude

The idea of a time of silence and solitude is at once inviting, yet daunting. We instinctually crave time alone, pining for unrushed time in prayer, reading Scripture, and sensing Jesus close by. But the idea of being quiet for more than a fleeting moment seems impossible. Even if we refrain from talking, the inner dialog of our mind races from one thought to another.

Most of us know a lot about Jesus and the Bible. We are busy helping others in our homes, communities, and churches, all in the name of Jesus. But when it comes time to being with Jesus, we are at a loss of how to simply enjoy time with him.

The first thing to know is that the Holy Spirit initiates your desire to press pause on your daily life to “retreat” (John 10:3). Jesus regularly and purposefully pulled away from the distractions of his busy life to be with his Father. The needs around him were constant, so being refreshed by his Father was a priority.

This is true for us as well. With others relying on us and numerous demands for our attention, we quickly become spiritually depleted. For him to refresh the dry or hurting places within our souls, we must be intentional to pause the busy, quiet our spirits, and be present before the Lord.

It is only in a place of solitude, where we step aside from our family, friends, phones, and to-do lists, that we realize we have deeply private parts of ourselves that need to be changed by the love of God. Silence and solitude are transformational because we are forced to face the parts of us that we would rather keep hidden.

It may take a little time to settle into silence and solitude, but with practice, you will sense your spirit calming, opening you up to experience the Lord’s love and delight for you (Zephaniah 3:17). There are no rules for what you should do while being silent and in solitude. It does not mean that you must remain still. In fact, it may be helpful to have a planned structure or engage in an activity to help your inner dialog quiet down. This guide is a brief set of suggestions to help you receive the most benefit from a silence and solitude retreat. Additional resources for understanding the spiritual discipline of contemplation are available at newim.org.

Getting Quiet When My Thoughts Will Not Stop

Adapted from “Why Come Away to Spend Time Being Silent and Alone” by Luann Budd

We retreat because when we are running all day, it is hard to feel connected to God and nearly impossible to hear him. Solitude and silence have an amazing ability to usher us into the presence of the Lord. It is in the quiet that we will sense he is near and hear his voice.

We have come away to be silent and alone so we can enter into his presence and be ready to hear the Lord. Our first challenge is to quiet the inner noise so that we can truly enter into silence.

Ken Gire beautifully writes of intimacy with the Almighty:

“We have all had moments when we’ve experienced something of that intimacy. Moments we can’t quite explain, yet can’t explain away. Moments when God has touched our lives like a soft hand of morning sun reaching through our bedroom window, brushing over our eyes, and waking us to something eternal. At some of these windows, what we see offers simply a moment of insight, making us slower to judge and quicker to show understanding. At a few of them, though, what we see offers a word spoken to the very depths of who we are. It may be a word to rouse us from sleep and ready us for our life’s journey. It may be a word to warn us of a precipice or guide us to a place of rest. It may be a word telling us who we are and why we are here and what is required of us at this particular juncture of our journey.

“Or, in a startling sun-drenched moment of grace, it may be a word telling us something we have longed all of our lives to hear—a word from God—a word so precious it would be worth the most arduous of climbs to hear the least audible of its echoes.”¹

We come away to spend time being silent and alone in order to hear these echoes.

Sometimes our life circumstances are very painful or emotionally disturbing, and we find it extremely difficult to turn off the mental rehearsing of our worries or doubts. Even against our will and desire to forget and move on, we quickly return to the unwanted thoughts looping back around.

It is a choice that we make: we can either let the voices of doubt loop over and over, or we can work to silence their noise so that we can intentionally focus on the truth of who God is and begin to experience the indescribable blessedness of his love. Depending on our circumstances, this work of quieting the inner voices can be a major challenge.

It is certainly possible to come to know the blessedness of His love in the most difficult of circumstances. The disappointments and tragedies of our lives can become like prison cells, isolating us in dark places. But they do not have to. In the depths of our pain, we can focus on the truth of God’s character and open a window in our hearts to let in his love.

Phillip Keller says it well: “For the man or woman who has come to know and love the Lord God in the depths of such intimacy, the times of solitude are the most precious in all of life.”

¹ Ken Gire, *Windows of the Soul-Experience God in New Ways*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), p. 11-12.

We don't wake up one day and suddenly have this kind of intimate relationship with the Almighty. We teach ourselves by entering into silence and solitude, silent internally, alone externally, so that we can nurture intimacy with our Father, hear him speak to us, and know his love before our foundations are shaken. And then, when our world is shaken, we have a depth of relationship that will carry us through.

Use this opportunity at the Springs to train yourself to enter into sacred silence, in order to listen well. We don't seek solitude simply for the purpose of being alone. We retreat into silence and solitude to love God and let ourselves be loved by him. That's our purpose.

Where is the Presence of the Lord?

Adapted from “Practicing the Presence and Conversations about Personal Worship” by Luann Budd

Before entering into silence, try to intentionally place yourself in the Lord’s presence. According to Francis deSalle, there are four simple theological truths about God’s presence to slowly consider to quiet your inner voices to focus on the Lord.

1. The Lord is present – everywhere present. He fills heaven and the entire universe (Psalm 113:4-6).
2. The Lord is present – with you everywhere you go (Psalm 139:7-10).
3. The Lord is present – sitting next to you, walking with you. There is no place he does not join you (Jeremiah 23:23-24).
4. The Lord is present – within you. Every breath you take is a reminder that the Holy Spirit indwells you (1 Corinthians 6:19).

When we think about the presence of God in our lives, it is already a fact. He IS with us always. There is nothing we need to do to have His presence with us. What we need is to be aware of His presence. That’s what we will be seeking: conscious awareness.

Definitions:

Conscious: “focusing one’s attention on something, or is even preoccupied by it”

Awareness: “vigilance in observing, or alertness in drawing inferences from what one experiences”

A good starting point for something we want to work on is to take some time and evaluate where we are and what we’re currently doing. So, take a few minutes to reflect. Look back over the past 36 hours, from the time you got up yesterday, to the time you arrived here. Maybe look at it in 2 hour increments and jot down the activity you were doing with just a few words. Then, go back and try to picture how you see yourself, your heart and thoughts, in relation to the Lord. While we know that he is always with us, we aren’t always consciously aware of his presence. How consciously aware of his presence were you?

Silence and solitude enable us to be aware that the Lord is nearby.

In addition to intentionally placing yourself in the presence of the Lord, having a phrase of Scripture to serve as an anchoring or centering reminder when distractions loom can be extremely helpful for refocusing. For instance, “The love of God lasts forever,” or “The Lord is my Shepherd,” or “Holy, Holy, Holy.”

When distractions occur, recalling your centering Scripture helps quiet inner and outer noise to return your awareness of God’s presence.

What Scripture comes to mind that could serve to anchor your focus back to the Lord?

How to Settle into Silence and Solitude

Adapted from “Four Suggestions to Enter into Silence and Solitude” by Luann Budd

Understanding why silence and solitude are necessary practices of the Lord’s disciples helps us engage in the necessary efforts. David’s writing in Psalm 37 provides an example for trusting, waiting, depending, and being still – learning to trust, learning to wait, learning to depend, and learning to be still are important aspects of learning to benefit from solitude and silence. We are not seeking emptiness. We are seeking the Lord.

There are numerous ways to settle into a posture of silence and solitude. Here are four suggestions for you to experiment with as you seek Him.

1. **Come away and leave behind the world.** Spend time here at the Springs, not in Bible study for the sake of finishing your lesson, but instead being in the Word simply “wasting” time interacting with God.

“In solitude, we voluntarily abstain from our normal patterns of activity and interaction with people for a time in order to discover *that our strength and well-being come from God alone.* ‘Solitude,’ writes Louis Bouyer, “serves to crack open and burst apart the shell of our superficial securities.” In experiences of solitude, we gently press into the Holy of Holies, where we are sifted in the stillness. Painfully, we let go of vain images of ourselves in charge of everything and everybody. Slowly, we loosen our grip on all those projects that to us seem so significant. Gently, we become more focused and simplified.”²

There is a lot to be learned from setting aside our agenda and intentionally *being* with God.

2. **Quiet the inner noise and enter into his rest.** As we come away for a personal retreat, the “work” of the first several hours is to silence the inner noise—that hyperactive inner voice that continually reminds us of what we need to do back home or a concern we need to worry about.
 - If the reminder is important, write it down.
 - Pray, calling on the name of Jesus, aloud, to ask him to silence the inner noise.
 - Even though we signed up to come away, we can find ourselves anxious about being alone. Our anxiety can keep us mentally preoccupied when we want to be internally quiet and at peace. Write down your worries and bring them to the Lord, *Here I am, Lord. Here’s what’s on my mind.* We don’t know what the Lord will do in our lives at this retreat. But we do know that he is able—he is able to come so near to us that we fall on our face trembling. We can trust that he will lead us as we need to be led.
 - Enter into the Lord’s presence and resist spending time with friends. Enter into silence and solitude so you are available to intimately connect with the Lord.
 - Give yourself permission to relax, to rest, to sleep. You’ll be able to enter into the presence of God and focus on intentionally listening to his voice, and his voice

² Richard Foster, *Prayer*, p. 100-01

alone—but it may take some time, maybe a nap, or a walk, and some intentional effort as you begin.

3. **Focus intentionally on beholding the Lord.** Brennan Manning describes for us the impact that “beholding the Lord” has in our lives:

“The effects of ‘beholding God’—that is, contemplating the glory of the Lord—are profound and far-reaching. In the life of prayer, for example, adoration assumes a preeminent position... Spiritual reading, meditation, and reflection on scripture inevitably yield to *silent* reverence. To adore is to recognize the unfathomable greatness of God and the nothingness of the adorer.”³

What does it mean to be silently reverent? I think it means to be in the Lord’s presence, being mindful of his majesty, experiencing his love, being in communion with him, in prayer without having to say any words but rather simply adoring him.

- Consider copying a passage or book of Scripture.
 - Spend time reflecting on His character and what he has done in your life.
4. **Consider where your heart is before the Lord.** Do you feel close? Do you feel distant? Read Habakkuk. Hear these words from the Lord and open your heart to a time of confession before him. Habakkuk is silenced, in awe of the majesty of God, as he waits for God to deliver. There’s a lot in this passage for us to learn about what we are trusting in and what it means to be silent before the Lord.
 - Spend time in confession bringing anything that is not right between you and the Lord, or you and other people, or attitudes just within yourself that aren't right to him.

Progress in intimacy with God means progress toward silence. “My soul finds rest in God alone,” declares the Psalmist (Ps. 62:1). Let us be filled with reverence in his presence, near, forgiven, loved, intimate, silent, in awe.

³ Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust-The Ragamuffin’s Path to God*, (San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), p. 62-63.

How to Structure Solitude Time

Adapted from “A Model of Solitude” by Luann Budd

If we find in our solitude an absence of peace or significance, we can determine to seek intimacy with our Creator. We can find in him true forgiveness for our guilt and personal value for our lack of self-esteem. God is never irrelevant to our lives. Experiencing his love and loving him is central to happiness and significance. In times of solitude, we can sense our spiritual impoverishment and feel our need to live for something beyond ourselves.

Prepare your heart.

- Read Psalm 63:1-5.
- Read Zephaniah 3:17.
- Say a prayer asking for refreshment and help recognizing the Lord’s presence.

Intentionally place yourself in the Lord’s presence

Be silent for 10-20 minutes, listening with pen in hand and paper to jot down any troubles, concerns, or to-do’s as they come to mind. Release them and as you do, withdraw from the busy world, leaving behind its pressures as you create this inner space for listening for his voice.

Reflect on a passage of Scripture.

Read a chapter or passage of Scripture softly aloud hearing the words as an intimate message to you from your Abba-Father. For that is what they are!

Silence your soul and listen for His words.

Be quiet and still as you seek to hear his still small voice of love whispering to your heart. Hearing his voice is an art and a skill that develops over time. Just enjoy being in his presence as you draw near to him.

Journal your response.

Write out your response to God. Include any words of encouragement, insights gained, nudging of the Spirit, and your feelings and experience in His presence. Pour them all out without self-consciousness or hesitation. He knows them all anyway!

Pray and praise.

Move gently out of your time of solitude, thanking him for his actual presence with you! Perhaps end your time by listening to music as you start to re-enter the world of activity and noise.

How to Structure Your Retreat

Adapted from “Designing Your Own Prayer Retreat” by Luann Budd

There are many suggestions here for what you might do as you are seeking to settle into a retreat where there will be large blocks of time when you will be asked to be silent and alone. Select some of the suggestions that resonate with you.

Consider choosing a theme to apply throughout the retreat.

Theme of A.C.T.S.

Begin with **Adoration** – Begin your retreat with several hours focused on adoring the Lord. Perhaps take a walk and notice the tiniest details of flowers or bugs and express your heart’s adoration of the Lord for his beauty and goodness. You might write a prayer of adoration. Or look for a song that expresses your heart’s love for Jesus.

Second session: Make **Confession** the focus of your meditation. Spend some time reading Psalm 32 and make David’s prayer of confession your own. Let the Spirit bring to mind anything that is not right – thoughts, words, motivations. Meditate on the Cross and internalize the truth that your sin required the Son of God to die.

Third session: Focus on **Thanksgiving**. For the full day, be intentional in your conversation with the Lord to give him thanks for all he has done and is doing in your life.

Fourth session: Let your adoration, confession, and thanksgiving to the Lord lead you to begin an outward focus of lifting your concerns and those of others to the Lord in **Supplication**. Filled up with the goodness of God, turn your prayer to lift others up.

Theme of LOVE

Begin with meditations on **God’s love for you** – specifically. Pray with a centering verse about the love of God. Journal about God’s love for you. Write a love letter from God to you.

Second session: Focus on your expression of **your love for God**.

Third session: Intentionally be aware of **opening your heart and receiving God’s love** for you experientially, deeply.

Fourth session: **Surrender your life to the love of God**. Lay everything at his feet.

Fifth session: **Commit yourself to live in response to God’s love for you**.

Or Choose Your Own Theme Such as The Names of God.

Consider utilizing some of these activities during the retreat.

- Read a Psalm.
- Write in your journal.
- Walk and repeat the Jesus prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner).
- Think deeply about Scripture (meditative reading).
- Focus on a short truth about God while also focusing on your breath (breath prayer).
- Worship with music.
- Listen deeply to God's Word (Lectio Divina).
- Confess your sins and ask for forgiveness.
- Review your day for the presence of God (Prayer of Examen).
- Recall your blessings and be grateful.
- Meditate on a work of art.
- Ponder the words of a favorite song or hymn.
- Memorize a prayer to draw your attention back to God (centering prayer).
- Allow your heart to soar in an unworded response to something of beauty you discover: a sunset, a tree, a bird, a flower...
- Draw a picture.
- Create a poem.
- Be silent and listen.

Guidance for a Retreat

Adapted from “Gentle Guidance Retreat Model” by Luann Budd

There are endless possibilities for structuring your time during a silence and solitude retreat. This model leads you through five movements over the course of three days. **Each day**, go through these movements and select the suggestion for that day. Pray the prayers written here. Read slowly the Scripture passages listed for each day. Reflect on the readings. You may want to use your journal for writing.

Movement I: Preparation of the Heart

Thank you, Father, for inviting me to come. You've given me a time of rest in a busy life of deadlines and significant needs to meet. What a wonderful gift—a retreat; time to read, and pray, and write my reflections; time to think and re-think. A time to gather myself from the various places I've been and refocus my life.

Dear Lord Jesus, I open my heart to you. Every aspect of my life is open to you. Come in. Sit down. Share with me your heart and help me see my heart, as you see it. Amen.

Day 1 afternoon: How goes your walk with God? On a scale of 1-10, 10 being best, write down how close you feel to God right now. Write about why you feel close to him and why you feel distant. What has drawn you and what has put a barrier between you and him? Do you feel encouraged or discouraged?

Day 1 evening: What situations this year didn't go the way you had hoped? Tell God about those disappointments and hurts. Write down how they made you feel. Where was God in your pain? What is the Lord showing you?

Day 2: What friends have let you down recently? How did they hurt you? What friends have been true friends? How have they strengthened you?

Day 3: Does your family support your ministry? Does your pastor, the church board, the women you work with? Where have you felt unsupported recently? Where have you felt supported? How has God supported you? What's your next step?

Movement II: Prayers of Confession

O Lord, who else or what else can I desire but You? You are my Lord, Lord of my heart, mind and soul. You know me through and through. In and through You everything that is, finds its origin and goal. You embrace all that exists and care for it with divine love and compassion. Why, then, do I keep expecting happiness and satisfaction outside of You? Why do I keep relating to You as one of my many relationships, instead of my only relationship, in which all other ones are grounded? Why do I keep looking for popularity, respect from others, success, acclaim and sensual pleasures? Why, Lord, is it so hard for me to make You the only One? Why do I keep hesitating to surrender myself totally to you? A Cry for Mercy - Henri Nouwen

Consider the following prompts:

- Where do you seek happiness and satisfaction outside of God?
- How are you putting other relationships ahead of the Lord?
- Where do you look for popularity, respect, success, acclaim, or pleasure?
- What do you put ahead of the Lord?
- What stops you from totally surrendering to the Lord?

Pray these passages:

Day 1:	Psalm 15	Psalm 32	Daniel 9	1 John 1:5-2:2
Day 2:	Luke 7:36-50	Rev 3:14-22	Nehemiah 9	1 John 1:5-2:2
Day 3:	Ezra 9	Psalm 51	1 John 1:5-2:2	

Write a prayer of confession to the Lord. See Daniel 9, Nehemiah 9, or Ezra 9 as a pattern.

Transition from confession by reading Psalm 20 and Psalm 103.

Movement III: Thoughts from Scripture

As you read, write down what God is saying to you.

Day 1:	Matthew 20	Matthew 23:1-12	Philippians 2
Day 2:	Mark 9:33-38	John 12:20-26	
Day 3:	Luke 17:7-10	Rev. 21:1 – 22:5	

Movement IV: Reflective Reading

Read a section of a book by a Christian author, known for reflecting of God. Select a book from the Springs library.

Movement V: Scriptural Encouragement, Prayer of Recommitment, a Hymn, and a Benediction

As the session draws to a close, spend time in recommitting your love and service to the Lord.

- Read a Scripture to encourage your ongoing work in the Lord, such as 1 Corinthians 15:58.
- Write a prayer of recommitment for your service to the Lord and those you minister to in partnership with him.
- Sing a hymn of worship, such as “I’ll Go Where You Want Me to Go.”

End your retreat with a Scriptural Benediction, such as Jude 23-25.

Be Prepared Before Arriving to Be Fully Present

Adapted from “How to Prepare for a Personal Silent Retreat” by Luann Budd

Addressing possible distractions in advance will help you completely engage with the Lord.

Prepare to Leave Home

- Let people know that you will be out of touch. Give the retreat center and the NEWIM emergency contact number to those who need to know.
- Turn on the “out of office” feature on your email.
- Make a to-do list of what needs to get done when you return home. Leave it where you can find it once the retreat is over.

Prepare for Physical Comfort

Some retreat centers are like hotels; others are more like rustic youth camps. Expect only the minimal amenities. Pack for your own personal comfort.

- Bring your own toiletries, including a hair dryer.
- Bring what you need to sleep comfortably. Your pillow? Your blanket? Bring them.
- Bring what you need to be comfortably dressed indoors and out. Dressing in layers accommodates for cooler or warmer environments. Remember, it is very casual.
- Bring what you need for your electronics – especially chargers. Don’t forget to bring earbuds if you want to listen to music. They are a must, even in your room. Consider downloading a playlist, instead of counting on streaming.
- If you enjoy time outdoors, bring what you need to be comfortable in nature: a blanket or camp chair, bug spray, a jacket, sunglasses, a hat, a water bottle, etc.
- Bring what you need to enjoy simply being in the Lord’s presence. Of course: a Bible, pens, and a journal. Perhaps: a book that you are drawn to or some art supplies to be creative.
- Bring cash if you want to leave the retreat staff a tip. In addition to cash, you can use a credit card to purchase from the small gift shop. Proceeds go towards scholarships for the Springs.

Prepare Your Heart

Know that the Lord delights in you. Begin to enjoy his presence while you are driving to the retreat center.

- Eliminate the stress of driving by leaving plenty of time to arrive. Print the directions and number of the retreat center in case GPS coverage is spotty. Enjoy listening to worshipful music or a good audio book.
- Once you have arrived, let your family know you arrived safely. Then spend time letting yourself settle into the slower rhythm of the retreat. Go for a walk, enjoy nature, and engage your five senses. Simply take in the loveliness of creation.
- It can take some time to release the mind of distractions. Make a bulleted list of what comes to mind; jotting them down keeps them from circling in your thoughts. Ask yourself, what are you bringing to this retreat or what concerns are you carrying? Are you going to bring these to the Lord or set them down for now?

- Notice if there is a question on your heart that you want to seek the Lord's direction. Ask him to use the retreat to give you wisdom. Capture in your journal Scripture, worship, prayer, books, or whatever the Lord gives you to reflect on.
- Do you have a goal for your time with the Lord? Perhaps drawing closer to him, finding rest for your soul, or processing grief. What is it you would love for the Lord to do during your retreat?
- Would structure help your retreat time with the Lord? Perhaps selecting some Scripture, written prayers, or worship music will help you focus on your retreat goals.

As you prepare for your personal retreat, keep looking to the Lord and let him lead you. Even if your retreat turns out to be different from what you had hoped, you can be confident that the Lord is speaking to you through all of it. It's good to linger with what annoys you. Reflect on what his message is for you in the unique environment. Do your best to prepare your home, your loved ones, and yourself to be gone. You can trust the Lord is guiding you in your preparations and during your retreat.

About NEWIM

The Network of Evangelical Women in Ministry is a non-profit, non-denominational organization that strengthens women who minister to others through networking, equipping, and encouraging them in their walk with God. NEWIM's Foundational Verse – Colossians 1:9-12.

Retreats

All of NEWIM's contemplative retreats are for the explicit purpose of giving women time to be with the Lord and deepening our love for him. So instead of fellowship times, there are hours dedicated to silence and solitude so that we can contemplate the goodness of his character, ponder the mysteries of his love, and pursue those spiritual activities that draw us closer to him.

The Springs Retreat – The Springs Retreat is flexible as it is intended to be a private retreat with various options so that you can design your own retreat. When we spend time with the Lord, we come to know his love more deeply and find out that his love is all we really need. Register and join us in the fall and spring each year.

Silent Retreats – The Silent Retreats provide an opportunity for women to be strengthened in their walk with Jesus and grow in the knowledge of his will through the practice of silence. The one and two day retreats provide an opportunity for deeper communion with the Lord through an extended time of reflection, prayer, and meditation.

Pastors' Wives Retreats – The pastors' wives weekend retreat is designed to give an intimate group of pastors' wives from all over the country the opportunity to come away for a weekend of rest, fellowship, renewal, worship, encouragement, beauty, wonder, and lavish love of Jesus. The weekend is hosted by NEWIM – there is no cost to the women. The retreats take place at a private home in Newport Beach, CA. For upcoming retreat and information: www.newim.org | 408-218-8225 | Email: info@newim.org.

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