



Personal Retreat Planner

...He went up on the mountain by
Himself to pray... Matthew 14:23

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MEDITATIONS ON ABIDING IN CHRIST

Come Away to a Secret Place and Rest Awhile...

It was Jesus' custom to get alone with His Father. If you read through the Gospels looking for this, you will see Him taking this time-out throughout His years of ministry. He was continuously with the Father, yet He also knew the value and beauty of getting away—for a moment, or an extended period of time. Retreating did not make the connection with the Father more real, it made the distractions fade away. He also invited His disciples into this practice, see Mark 6:31.

The reality of life in this generation is that we rarely experience quiet, we rarely attempt to “be still and know He is God.” We flock to the hustle and bustle of a city, of an overly filled schedule, of traveling in life's fast lane. This hustle can easily distort our communion with God. We hurriedly read the Psalms, but do not take part in the communion with God that they attempt to usher us into. We run across Old and New Testament verses that tell us to ponder, to muse, to think upon, to consider yourselves as...but, do we?

Remember, we are people of the Word; people to whom God has spoken; long ages ago through the prophets but in these last days in His Son. His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh; our ever-present-help through the Holy Spirit indwelling us. The church is a people built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone (Ephesians 2). As people of the Word, we ought to find time every now and then to bask in it at length, to make time to pray, to worship, and to meditate without the everyday distractions. A time to come away to a secret place, rather than the usual place.

When we are abiding in Christ, we too will share Jesus' customs, and the customs that the early church was devoted to. We will intentionally cultivate regular habits of being in the Word, being devoted to prayer, and to the fellowship, etc. In addition to the daily spiritual habits and customs, every now and then, we need a retreat.

We too will seek a place out of the bustling city, in His creation, committing ourselves again to walk in His ways, to return to the ancient paths that lead to His peace and joy, to delight in the presence of the One who delights in ours. Every age is filled with its own distractions; it is human to be distracted. It is Christ-like and a mark of being His new creation that we would fight against distractedness and slow down, being still, sitting at His feet to learn. We need daily to choose the good portion, and every now and then we need to get away to be alone, communing with our Triune God.

Different seasons of life allow for different ways of carrying this out. As a working woman before I had children, I reserved two of my vacation days each year to drive up on the Blue Ridge Parkway; I'd stay until nearly dinner time. As a mom of babies, I barely made it to the corner booth at Panera or a local bookstore and coffee shop, for an hour alone. As a mom of growing

children, I've been able to plan overnights—staying at hotels or airbnb locations. What does your season of life allow for, and how can you plan for that?

When we seek Him with all of our being—our whole self—then we find Him. The communion He draws us into is sweet and satisfying. To be able to set aside this extra time will prove renewing, refreshing. As Paul told Timothy that he needed rekindle the gift of God within him, so we need times to rekindle His gifts within us as well—the gifts of faith, hope, love, joy and peace; the gifts of the Holy Spirit; growing in grace and knowledge (which is the treasure we are told to guard in the letters to Timothy). Planning a personal retreat is an intentional time to come away, be alone with your God, away from the things that normally require or request your attention. This is one of the many ways to build yourself up in your most holy faith.



...building yourselves up in your
most holy faith and praying in
the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves
in the love of God, waiting for
the mercy of our Lord Jesus
Christ that leads to eternal life.

Jude 20-21

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Begin your planning—hour, day, or overnight?

Hour:

To plan a small time out as a mama of babies or even toddlers, plan with your husband or a babysitter, allowing yourself the full time in between nursing, or during a naptime, or a convenient playtime, to be gone. Choose a cafe very near by. Be a good patron—buy a cup of coffee, and a generous amount of food to justify your having used 2 or 3 hours of their time. The Lord will not be honored by us being selfish members of society—so prepare to buy enough to show that you appreciate the service of sitting there.

With only 2 or 3 hours, focus on a few chapters of Scripture, bring your journal, and perhaps a book. Choose a portion that you want to spend time in, a portion that you recently realized is a favorite, or in looking up passages intentionally. This is a good time to focus on just one point of the Westminster Confession, looking up all the Scriptures, journaling through your own thoughts and questions as you read and re-read the Word.

<https://www.pcaac.org/bco/westminster-confession/>

In this season of caring for young ones, you may want to set this time aside at least once a month. For those younger years of raising children, I settled into a routine of one evening of this sort every week. An hour or slightly longer to get away, sip coffee, eat a danish (before my body told me to stop eating gluten), and enjoy the distraction free time to think about what I was reading, to pray, to cast my burdens on Him. This will allow you to walk in the truth that “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in God the LORD we have an everlasting Rock.” (Isaiah 26:3-4) One of my most cherished memory verses from those years is 2 Thessalonians 3:5, I often pray it for myself, my family, my church; “May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.” So much to ponder here, as you meditate on these promises He will grow you in your love and knowledge of Him, and in the grace you need to be steadfast, and to live your daily life!

With limited time, if you are able to do this once a week, or once a month, then pick a section of Scripture you want to dig deeply into, and return to it every time. Journal through it, pick a section to memorize. When you memorize it, you are able to meditate on it in those times when it seems that you “have no time” to get alone with the LORD. The Spirit will make it sweet, will give you understanding, will grow you, as you think upon what you have treasured in your heart—even when that thinking takes place while you change diapers, scrub floors, prep meals, and tend to little ones who need you to be very present and available.

Close your time away by writing out your prayers, casting your burdens on the LORD who cares for you, pouring out your heart to Him, and asking for His peace to guard your heart and mind. While our daily habit must be to pray without ceasing (in the midst of our daily humdrum or chaos) so also we share the need from time to time to get away and have focused prayer.

Day:

To plan a day out, decide first whether you are packing lunch, or buying lunch out. Then plan the rest of your day accordingly. If you have children, you'll also need to plan food options for them, unless your husband or a friend or babysitter will be taking care of that. You'll want to plan whether you are going to one location all day, or several.

For example—begin at a local coffee shop that has amazing quiche, then go to a local park for a prayer walk, have a late lunch at a different cafe while reading, end at another park where you can sit comfortably to read, pray, journal, etc. Perhaps the weather turns out poorly, have a back up plan—a bookstore or library where you can sit in a corner, enjoying the quiet. When I have a whole day to myself, I usually spend hours at a nearby National Park, perhaps you can find one that is close enough for a day trip.

Bring your Bible and journal, and either one of the guides below or a book. With a bit more time to devote to reading and studying, I recommend choosing a topic, or a section of the Westminster Confession, or another book on a doctrine you want to learn more about. If you have never read a book to grow deeper in your knowledge of doctrine before, I recommend one of the following:

The Unfolding Mystery, by Edmund Clowney

Any of the Good Portion books:

<https://www.christianfocus.com/products/2891/the-good-portion-christ>

The Holy Trinity, by Robert Letham

The Work of Christ, by Robert Letham

The Holy Spirit, by Sinclair Ferguson

(<https://www.ivpress.com/contours-of-christian-theology-set>)

One book that I return to often, when my weary soul needs refreshment, is John Owen's "Communion With God." <https://www.christianfocus.com/products/1083/communion-with-god>

Perhaps you would rather pick a few options to help focus your time:

New Testament passage to read and journal through

Passage to memorize

Confession, Creed, or Catechism to think through, with Scripture references

Psalms to pray through

Old Testament Promises to see as fulfilled in Christ

Focused time of prayer, for yourself, for your church, for your family; with Scripture passages to guide this time (many rich prayers in the NT epistles can guide this time).

Overnight:

To plan your weekend, or overnight, the first step is to decide on a date, pick a location, and book your room. With popular locations you'll want to plan at least two months in advance. For airbnb options, it is difficult to find ones *without* a two-night minimum, but not impossible. I found two lovely ones the past two years. You'll want to shop in advance to make sure you have enough food on hand for your family, and the food you may need to take with you. I have had years of eating out, and years of taking all my food with me—both are easy if you plan ahead.

You'll want to decide the length, think of food and location(s), planning for both yourself and those you leave at home. I always plan for treats for my family, to make this time less about “how come mama gets to eat out?” and they more readily accept that I need time away to focus my heart on the LORD, a respite, a time to be still.

Ideas for Your Itinerary:

9a.m. depart from home, with lunch packed, thermos of coffee or tea, plenty of water. Bring your Bible, a journal, one of the guides below—or a book of your choosing, some creeds and confessions, etc. You may also want a hymnal or a printed out song or two. I found myself one year trying to remember the words to a song I desperately wanted to sing—and being out of cell service with no wifi, all I could do was hum—but I wanted the words!

Perhaps your first stop is at a local diner/coffeeshop, sit for an hour, enjoy second breakfast and journal through your prayers—asking God to lead this time, and to revive you through the joys of getting away with Him. Write out some Scripture passages in your journal that you would like to muse upon.

You will most likely be unable to check into your hotel or airbnb until the afternoon, so after that coffee shop; pick your next destination: a park, a library, etc.

Read

Journal

Write out your prayers

Take a walk through a park, notice and observe, pray, breath deeply and sing in your heart; if at a State or local park, find a nice spot for your picnic lunch. Bring your hammock or camp chair! If not picnicking, perhaps drive near your destination and find a cafe.

2-3p.m. Check in, perhaps take a nap! Settle down with a cup of afternoon tea and read from the books you've brought. Journal, read, pray. Hike? Sketch or watercolor some of the beautiful scenery? Or simply take it in, marveling at your Creator.

5p.m. Dining out? I've done it, though you may get looks for dining alone. Eating in? Put on some background music, and enjoy what you have brought. Read while you eat. Time to dig in

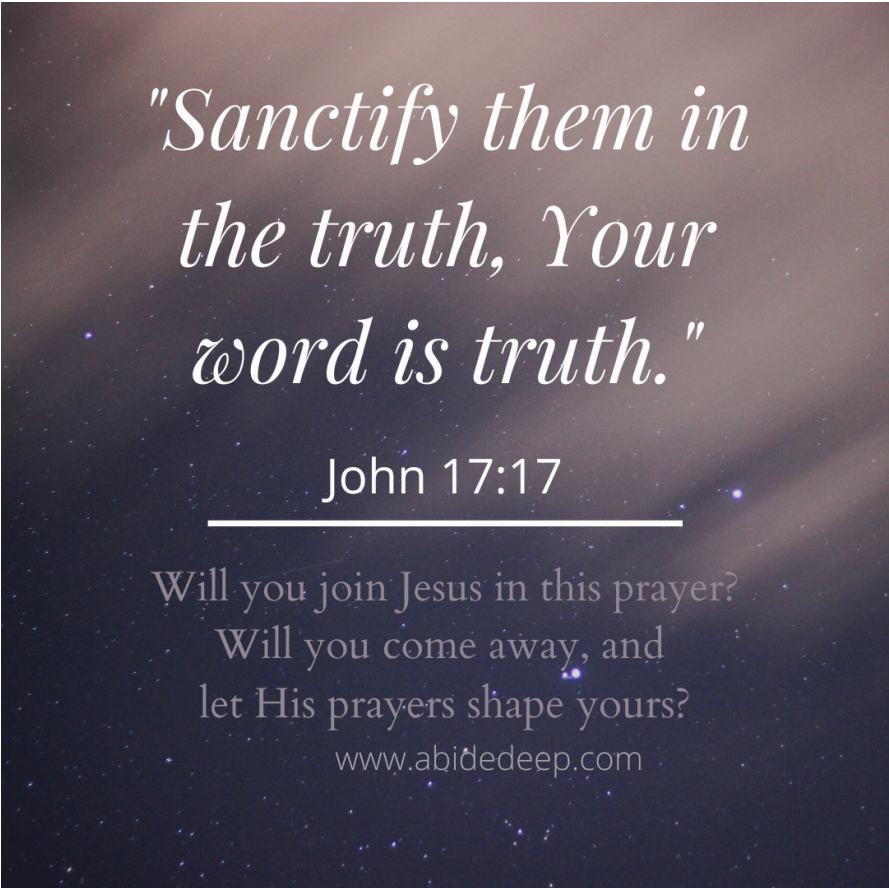
without interruption. Time to study, to meditate, to muse upon the Word; and to let His words lead you in prayer, as you commune with your God.

8-9 p.m. Call home to say goodnight to kiddos. Some relaxing stretches and pilates? A shower, with some refreshing eucalyptus or lavender to sniff. Perhaps stay up late reading, because you can! Write out the passage you want to meditate on in the morning. Or go to bed early, because you never get enough sleep!

Next morning, eat the breakfast you've brought (muffins, fruit, yogurt, beef jerky...) or eat out. Check out is usually 11a.m., so take advantage of the comfort of your room to read and journal, sing and praise, and cry out, and exult in your hope.

11-2, take your bag lunch to the woods, the park, the picnic area, the lake, etc. More time to read, work on Scripture memory, writing out portions to keep as a bookmark, or journal through your prayers.

2-4 The slow drive home, run some errands you enjoy doing alone. Pray as you go that His refreshing Spirit would uphold you, and prepare you to be refreshing to your family, your community, your local church.



*"Sanctify them in
the truth, Your
word is truth."*

John 17:17

Will you join Jesus in this prayer?
Will you come away, and
let His prayers shape yours?

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Now that the logistics are mapped out, time to plan what you will focus on during this time away. There is freedom here, beloved; I only offer suggestions. But remember, it is through His Word and Spirit—never apart from the Scriptures (i.e. the Sword of the Spirit), that we hear from Him, learn of Him, know Him, and grow in grace and knowledge.

Pick a few options to help focus your time, or if you'd rather, there are a few pre-planned options which you will find towards the end:

- A spiritual discipline
- A longer portion of Scripture to read, and re-read
- Passage to memorize
- Hymns to sing
- Confession, Creed, or Catechism to think through, with Scripture references
- Psalms to pray through
- Old Testament Promises to see as fulfilled in Christ
- Pray for yourself
- Pray for your church
- Pray for your family

Consider how much time you have, and do not make the mistake so many of us do, trying to cram too much in! This is not the time to hustle, this is the time to slow down, come away, be still; the time to seek His presence apart from things that usually require your attention; a time to focus, not to be scattered in too many directions.

Remember this is also not a time for self-help, or for worldly ideas of “me time.” There is a way of seeking Him through a retreat time, and a way of merely running away from family, circumstances, and the humdrum. This is not intended to be a running away, or a time of selfish abandon; this is “purposeful getting alone with your God time.” Be purposeful. Bring the things that will aid you in setting your mind on things above, and leave behind the things that can be enjoyed properly at another time.

Theologically rich book recommendations:

Pocket sized versions of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Larger Catechism and Shorter Catechism, Various creeds, etc.

The Glory of Christ, by John Owen; Spiritual Mindedness, by John Owen

Institutes of the Christian Religion, by John Calvin

Charity and Its Fruits, by Jonathan Edwards

Redemption Accomplished and Applied, by John Murray

The last of the nitty gritty details:

Do you have special dietary needs? Have I ever had to plan this way? Yes. I've been battling some health issues for over six years now. I cannot touch anything processed, cannot have sugar (though I can use honey and maple syrup), and I eat all organic produce and grass fed beef, pastured poultry and pork, and raw dairy. In years past, before realizing this, I ate out. In these past few years that I've come to know this about my body, I have taken food that I can eat. I prepared food that I could eat cold, and stayed at AirBnB locations that had a fridge. Perhaps cold foods don't sound luxurious enough for you—but remember, this time away is not about pampering yourself, and creating instagram-worthy moments.

So bake a few things, buy some fresh berries and cheeses and summer sausages (USWellness Meats sells pasture raised, sugar free options!); make some deviled eggs, buy some yogurt, prepare a few meal-sized salads. Don't forget silverware and napkins. And chocolate! Bring along your favorite teas or coffees. I've stayed in places that had Keurig machines, and some that have had smaller than normal drip coffee makers; check ahead of time so that you can plan accordingly, you may need coffee filters, or a reusable pod.

If you would like a pre-planned idea, consider one of these guided options:

Peace

To work on memorization, read, write in your journal, and recite throughout the day:

John 16:33

“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

Journal: Why did Jesus speak certain things? What are those things—write them down and ponder them. Who did He speak them to? How did they understand them? How can we? What is the role of the Spirit in your understanding (John 16:12-15; 14:16-24)? How is the Trinity united in this ministry? What is ‘tribulation’? When/where will Jesus’ disciples expect this tribulation? (perhaps turn to 1 Peter) What is courage? How can you “take” it? How is courage related to hope?

Peace in Him, not from Him as a commodity! Take some time to reflect on your union with Christ, and the “peace that passes all understanding” that fills us as we live knowing we are His beloved—united in His death and resurrection, co-heirs.

How does your understanding of ‘peace’ correspond to OT Shalom? Shalom is the OT “peace” that is a sense of completeness, wholeness, wellbeing, soundness, and a bit of ‘lack of war.’

Read and journal through the following, and ask the Holy Spirit to give you a fuller understanding of His peace, the peace into which you were called, peace with God, the peace of God, which Jesus said we have “in Him”:

Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17

Romans 4:20-5:11

Philippians 4:4-9

Hebrews 12:25-13:21

The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace,
Because he trusts in You.
Trust in YHWH forever,
For in YHWH God,
we have an everlasting Rock.
Isaiah 26:3-4

How can you walk in His peace? How can you “let it” rule in your heart? Is there something troubling your heart, and His peace feels like a far off dream? This is where journaling really helps, you can focus on casting your cares upon Him, write them down, then stop rehearsing them in your thoughts. Then write out verses that will help you remember that He cares for you, He is faithful, His love is unending, His power unmatched, and His love is set upon you.

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to Your Name, O Most High; to declare Your *hesed* in the morning, and Your faithfulness by night. Psalm 92

What is *hesed*? God’s *hesed*? It is a love unlike any other earthly love we can imagine. It is love sourced in the One who is Love, not impacted by any earthly circumstance. This love never changes, never wanes, never grows based on our earning or performing. It is unchanging, perfect, complete, whole. This love is steadfast, loyal, faithful, makes-and-keeps covenant promises. This love cannot be segmented or dissected. There are examples of those who glimpse and understand this *hesed* saying they want to give and receive *hesed* from others (David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel is one example). It is the love displayed in His cross, and that we can abide in.

Would His peace rule in your heart more fully if you meditated on His *hesed*, declared His *hesed* to your heart, and lived according to His patterns—of speaking of these things with others as you sit, stand, are at home, or walking along the way, as you rise from or go to bed? Yes, beloved. His Spirit will produce the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control in us, and they will flow from us in word and deed, as the living water fills us and overflows. (Take some time to journal your prayers and questions on this)

Blessed, happy, flourishing are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Matthew 5:9

Peace “keeping” is not peacemaking. What is the foundation of His peace? Peacekeeping means I turn away from addressing issues, rather than working through them, and towards the goal of putting to death the enmity that rears up. What is it about peace keeping strategies that will hold you back from enjoying peace-filled relationships and a mind guarded by His peace? How can you begin the regular habit of praying for, and seeking for, peace in your family, and in your local church; in your neighborhood, town, city, etc.

Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Seek the shalom of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to YHWH for it; for in the shalom of it shall you have shalom. Jeremiah 29:7

Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in all circumstances. The Lord be with all of you. - 2 Thessalonians 3:16

And God, the source of peace, will soon crush the Adversary under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. - Romans 16:20

Recommended hymns for your time away:

Arise, my soul arise!

Be Thou my Vision

Come, Then Lord Jesus

Dear Refuge of my Weary Soul

Thy Mercy, My God

Light

1 John 1:5 God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

Jesus is the radiance of God's glory! (Hebrews 1) In Him, we see all that we need to. If we've seen Him we've seen the Father. We do not look elsewhere. Only in Christ Jesus has God chosen to reveal all that we need to know; only Jesus is the exact representation of what our finite minds can know about God.

Here in 1 John 1:5 light is true knowledge. Think about being in a dark room, you do not know what anything looks like because you cannot see. With the addition of a light you see and know, and can act on that knowledge. In that light you will not trip over furniture, or walk into a wall. Light is truth, deeper than surface knowledge of circumstances or surroundings, so this analogy falls short as most do. In God's light, you won't be mistaken about what is ultimate, what is eternal, and Who God really is, what He loves, what He hates, what He is doing as His plan of redemption plays out.

In God there is no darkness at all. None. Darkness is in constant battle with Light. A losing battle that we sometimes feel raging against us. Light will always overcome. Light chases away the darkness (Light does not adopt or redeem the darkness, but removes it). We were all once slaves of darkness, with minds and hearts filled with darkness. Whether we consider our worldview, our conscience, our desires, or our opinions--all were tainted by darkness. But now in Christ, we are children of the Light!

Consider Light as knowledge, of truth, of reality, of the world's true condition, your true identity in Christ, and our true home. The Spirit enlightens us, giving us the possibility of knowing, and of remaining in His Truth. As we abide in His Truth, we become more like Him, reflecting His glory.

Consider the following passages, write them out in your journal; write down questions you have, prayers that arise in your heart as you reflect on them. Marvel in His Light!

2 Cor. 4:

John 12:46

Psalm 112:1-4

Ephesians 5:6-20

1 Peter 2:9-12

The Holy Spirit transforms us into the Son's likeness; we are created anew, in His image in which there is no darkness at all, including:

True Knowledge, Wisdom, Prudence

Affections realigned to match God's

No ignorance that will not be touched by His light

No more snark, sarcasm, harsh words

No more excuses for 'personality' and remaining an individual "me" apart from Christ

Journal exercise: as the Spirit to reveal the dark ways that you need to let go of; ask Him to shine His light into the recesses where unbelief lurks. What would you add to the above list? What has He been showing you about the glory of being in His Light?

We were rescued from the domain of darkness, and transferred to the kingdom of His Beloved Son! In darkness we operated by fear, as slaves of darkness, unable to have God's perspective of the world or of our own lives. Unable to act on truth or hope, because of our love for the tainted dark worldview we lived in. In Christ, the darkness no longer fills us! In Him, as children of Light, we grow in grace and knowledge, and are renewed to a true knowledge (a great study for this week would be Colossians 2:8-10 and 3:5-11; and Ephesians 4:17-25). Write out these verses, and ask Him to lead you in this, that you would be even more in awe of Him for how He transforms you.

Hymns:

Abide With Me

Beneath the Cross of Jesus

Crown Him with Many Crowns

O Love that Will Not Let Me Go

Rock of Ages

The Sands of Time are Sinking

Life

John 14:6 I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me.

Let this verse lead you in your first prayer time of the day. He came that you may know the Father, and come to the Father. Come. Consider all that Jesus reveals about the Triune God; and His work on your behalf to be these for you. Let this verse lead you in a time of thanksgiving. Then slowly read through the entire Upper Room Discourse, John 13-17, considering all that Jesus shows of the Father, of Himself the Son, of the Spirit; of our fellowship with God, of our fellowship with other believers, of what our days will be like, of His constant abiding presence and help and strength and joy and peace... Consider the quality of our eternal life, and of the endurance we need while we await His return.

John 11:25 I am the resurrection and the life...

He is, not "He has and might give you some of..." How does this make a difference in how you commune with God? How does this make a difference in how you seek His help in your circumstances, casting all your anxieties and burdens on Him? If we are told to live as those united to Christ in His death and resurrection, what habits or rhythms of grace can aid you? Prayer. Gratitude. Fasting. Scripture memorization. Singing. Journaling. Remember, for these to be truly spiritual habits or disciplines, they are **of the Spirit** and not of your flesh and self effort; and the Spirit does not work apart from the Word, do not stray from Scripture as a means of pursuing "spirituality". "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Colossians 2).

Spend some time journaling through Romans 6:1-23; 2 Corinthians 5; Galatians 2:19-3:5; Titus 3:5-7. Ponder the life we now live in light of the faithfulness of Christ to fulfill the law on our behalf. On the basis of His righteousness. Brought into this life by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit.

...but you do not come to Me that you may have life...

Read through John 5; these words are directed at those who tried to understand how to live godly lives apart from God. Have you ever treated Scripture this way? Spend some time asking the Spirit to grow you in loving His Word. Pray through Psalm 119, writing out the verses that really express your heart's desire.

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the One True God... John 17:3

...I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. John 10:10

They overcame...and they loved not their life unto death. Rev 12:11

Romans 6:13 present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead!

Take the time to meditate on these verses, read them in context, make them your prayer. As you get to Romans 6, read verses 8-14; then imagine yourself enacting that scene of presenting yourself to God as one alive from the dead! Take the time *now* to make this an extended exercise while you are taking your personal retreat, so that when you return home you can meditate on this, and make it a shorter weekly or daily or seasonal remembrance—considering yourself alive in Christ.

Imagine yourself, much like the prophet Isaiah, seeing the LORD seated on His throne.

Remember the confident access we have in Christ, and imagine seeing as Stephen did while he was being stoned to death—seeing Jesus rise up and stand to welcome you to the throne room.

Now, **present yourself** to the King of Kings! Show respect and honor, as men do earthly kings. Hallowed be Thy Name. “Here I am, Lord...”

Does this King also not have the look of the Father awaiting His prodigal (that is me and you!)?

Alive in Christ. In. Not from, not a possession, not something you took and walked away with. Your life is hidden in Christ. In Christ. Because He lives, you live; you live because of His faithfulness, not because of anything you do or think or feel...

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace...but now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.”

Romans 6:12-14, 22.

Hymns:

How Firm a Foundation
Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee
My God, My Help in Ages Past
O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing
On Jordan's Stormy Banks I stand
The Sands of Time are Sinking

Examine yourself,

Day One

2 Corinthians 13:5 “Test yourself/examine yourself to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you...” The only time Paul issues this command, nevertheless, in his other epistles he leads churches through times of looking at themselves to see what is truly coming out of their hearts, what is truly in their hearts.

So every now and then, it is helpful to search the Scriptures, reminding ourselves what true faith is, what life in Christ is, what Scriptures says about living in this in-between time while we await Christ's return, and to preach these truths to our souls. A few passages to begin: John 6; Hebrews 11; Ephesians 1-3; Romans 5; Galatians 2:15-21; Titus 2:11-3:7

Pray through Psalm 139, especially verses 23-24: Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my ways; see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Examining our faith should include recalling ourselves to a posture of repentance, and a renewed desire to pick up our cross and follow Christ. A few passages and suggestions as you pursue this:

1 Cor 11:1 “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” [what of Paul should we imitate?]

2 Cor 7:1 “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” [list out the promises, spend time finding the many places God promises to dwell with His people. What defilement would God have you crucify, and put off (c.f. Romans 8)?]

Hebrews 13:7, 9 “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith...do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods...”

1 Timothy 6:11-12 But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” [think upon the things you are told to pursue, ponder how. Muse upon the eternal life to which you were called, and how we should ‘take hold’ of it]

To examine our faith, we ultimately are seeking to recognize whether the Holy Spirit is at work in us, or whether we are grieving Him... Have you seen His fruit, do others recognize His fruit in you? Do you in fact groan with Him (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5; Romans 8:18-25)?

From ***Deep Simplicity: Meditations on Abiding in Christ***, pg. 27-28

The fruit of this clinging, of letting God's Word abide in us, cannot be produced by flesh, by any sort of self-effort. And like any other fruit it does not ripen immediately. The vine provides all the nutrients and is the source of life for all the branches. Likewise, in clinging to the vine, the branches bear fruit. The branches do not do any of the work, but in living connected and abiding lives they glorify the vine. Like all the deep works of God, the fruit of clinging, of abiding, mysteriously grows. As we cling to the Word of life, we come to 'adorn the doctrine of God' (see Titus 2:10) and both our inner and outer life reflect God's Word rather than reflecting the passing and ever shifting words of this world.

He does not lead apart from His Word. We listen and follow as His Spirit gives us understanding of the Scriptures. He makes us more like Christ, shaping our thoughts, our affections, our wills, our inclination to believe and obey and understand; firmly rooted and grounded, drawn into His steadfastness.

Hymns:

Jesus I am resting, resting
A Mighty Fortress is our God

Day Two

Think through the passages of the New Testament telling us what we are to be dedicated to or devoted to or constant in; write these down and pray through them. Ask God to grow you in this! Acts 2; Romans 12; Hebrews 10:19-36; Jude 3, 20-21; Luke 10:42

There are a few yearly practices that can help keep you holistically seeking, and abiding in, the One True God. One such practice I have tweaked, from "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" is to review my personal mission statement.

To Make or review your Personal Mission Statement:

Think about your roles/relationships/gifts and callings. List these out, knowing your "job" is only one facet of your vocation. The relationships you are in and the roles you have in the lives of others are important, more than the job factor of your life. After listing each out, think of some goals for the year, ways to grow in each, people to be accountable to/in conversation with and

prayer. What will people see embodied in you as you fulfill these roles? Will they see Christ in you, will your light shine in these roles, will you be a good steward of all that He has given you and put in you and made you to be? Consider those whose faith and stewardship you can imitate as you consider your own life's mission.

Example:

Disciple of the LORD

Wife

Mama

Homeschool Teacher

Member of my local church

Bible Study teacher

Friend

Daughter

Sister

Member of...

This may be something you begin on your personal retreat, but do not finish for a few more days, as you pray, write, re-write, remember something you've forgotten, polish, etc.

My finished product, given here merely as an example:

My mission is to be a Christ-centered woman, actively growing in love and knowledge and participating in His kingdom, Christ's Body, and the specific roles He's given me to play, in love.

Do you see how this mission does not change with the "job" category? This was my mission statement when I had full time employment outside of the home, and it remains the same now that I work at home full time.

Close your day by slowly reading Philippians 3, asking the Spirit to give you the endurance to press on, to know the power of His resurrection, and to trust not in your own righteousness but rather in Christ's righteousness that comes through faith. What a wonderful passage to pray through as you prepare to head home.



You therefore...be strong in the grace that is
in Christ Jesus...Be diligent to present
yourself approved to God as a workman
who does not need to be ashamed,
accurately handling the word of
truth...continue in the things you have
learned...

2 Timothy 2:1, 15; 3:14

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