

Retreat Day

...Come with me by yourselves
to a quiet place...

(Mark 6:31)



The material for this one-day retreat provides an opportunity to slow down and reflect at the beginning of a new year; to remember that in times of uncertainty, turbulence and transition, God has it all in His hands. We can choose to walk with Him into whatever the new year holds.

There are written prayers and Scripture passages for reflection. Songs are provided to reflect on, to sing, or to find on YouTube and listen to – whatever you find helpful. Some songs you may not know, or not know well – this can be a good opportunity to discover something new and/or just to reflect on the text. The writers of the songs and prayers are provided if you want to look them up yourself. There are also various suggestions to deepen your engagement with this Scripture verse. Do whatever you find helpful – or something else entirely. We all have different ways of connecting with God (and with others) so find what works for you – or maybe try something new.

On-line Clip - <https://youtu.be/xGs6-y2wfv8>

CONFIDENTLY WAITING COME WHAT MAY...ⁱ

Call to worship

Be still and know that I am God.
Be still, quieten your mind,
let your thoughts be settled and breathe deeply.

Be still. Be silent. Stop.
And know that I am God.
I am God. Know me.
In your silence, know that I am present, that I am love,
that I am grace.
Be still...know me.



Prayer

We thank you, Father, Lord of all time,
for the gifts of food, warmth and company.
for your love and the protection of our homes,
and, in all that this year may hold,
for the friendship of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The Promise of His Glory (adapted)

AA. p. 319

Song

My heart is filled with thankfulness
To Him who bore my pain;
Who plumbed the depths of my disgrace
And gave me life again;
Who crushed my curse of sinfulness
And clothed me in His light
And wrote His law of righteousness
With pow'r upon my heart.

My heart is filled with thankfulness
To Him who walks beside;
Who floods my weaknesses with strength
And causes fears to fly;
Whose ev'ry promise is enough
For ev'ry step I take,
Sustaining me with arms of love
And crowning me with grace.

Stuart Townend

My heart is filled with thankfulness
To Him who reigns above,
Whose wisdom is my perfect peace,
Whose ev'ry thought is love.
For ev'ry day I have on earth
Is given by the King;
So I will give my life, my all,
To love and follow Him.



Scripture

God is our shelter and our strength.

When troubles seem near, God is nearer, and He's ready to help.

So why run and hide?

² No fear, *no pacing, no biting fingernails.*

When the earth spins out of control, *we are sure and fearless.*

When mountains crumble and the waters run wild, *we are sure and fearless.*

³ Even in heavy winds and huge waves,

or as mountains shake, *we are sure and fearless.*

[pause]

⁸ Come, gaze, *fix your eyes* on what the Eternal can do.

Amazing, He has worked desolation here on *this battlefield*, earth.

⁹ God can stop wars anywhere in the world.

He can *make scrap of all weapons*: snap bows, shatter spears,
and burn shields.

¹⁰ "Be still, *be calm, see*, and understand I am the True God.

I am honoured among all the nations.

I am honoured over all the earth."

¹¹ *You know* the Eternal, the Commander of *heavenly armies*, surrounds us *and protects us*;
the True God of Jacob is our shelter, *close to His heart.*

(Ps 46:1-3, 8-11 *The Voice*)

Reflection

In April 1943, German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was arrested by the Gestapo for his resistance to Hitler and his regime. Bonhoeffer was particularly outspoken about Hitler's euthanasia programme and genocidal persecution of the Jews. As the new year of 1945 approached, he wrote the following poem (translated by Fred Pratt Green). In April 1945 he was hastily tried and executed, two weeks before the camp he was in was liberated by Allied forces.

By gracious powers so wonderfully sheltered,
and confidently waiting come what may,
we know that God is with us night and morning
and never fails to greet us each new day.

Yet is this heart by its old foe tormented,
still evil days bring burdens hard to bear.
O give our frightened souls the sure salvation
for which, O Lord, you taught us to prepare.

And when this cup you give is filled to brimming
with bitter suffering, hard to understand,
we take it thankfully and without trembling,
out of so good, and so beloved, a hand.

Yet when again, in this same world, you give us
the joy we had, the brightness of your sun,
we shall remember all the days we lived through,
and our whole life shall then be yours alone.

Now, when your silence deeply spreads around us,
O let us hear all your creation says -
that world of sound which soundlessly invades us,
and all your children's highest hymns of praise.



Read slowly through these words again. Note which words or phrases stand out for you.

Reflect on what God might be saying to you through those words.

You might like to formulate your thoughts into your own prayer or poem.

SILENCE

Song

Still, my soul, be still
And do not fear
Though winds of change may rage tomorrow
God is at your side
No longer dread
The fires of unexpected sorrow

God, You are my God
And I will trust in You and not be shaken
Lord of peace renew
A steadfast spirit within me
To rest in You alone

Still, my soul, be still
Do not be moved
By lesser lights and fleeting shadows
Hold onto His ways
With shield of faith
Against temptation's flaming arrows

Still, my soul, be still
Do not forsake
The Truth you learned in the beginning
Wait upon the Lord
And hope will rise
As stars appear when day is dimming

Keith and Kristyn Getty

Prayer

God of day and night,
of frost and sunshine,
of rest and growth, we praise you for the rhythms and patterns of life:
for the gentle dying of each season
and the coming of the next;
for the wonder of new life, in all its forms,
and the quiet flowing of youth into age.
Give us eyes and hearts to perceive you
in the unfolding of our years,
and help us in this new-born year
to make more space for you,
the Giver of it all.



AA. p. 320

Scripture

Eternal One: *Remember* who created you, O Jacob?
Who shaped you, O Israel?
See, you have nothing to fear. I, *who made you*, will take you back.
I have chosen you, named you as My own.

² *When you face stormy seas I will be there with you with endurance and calm;*
you will not be engulfed in raging rivers.
If it seems like you're walking through fire with flames licking at your limbs,
keep going; you won't be burned.

¹⁰ Eternal One: You are My witnesses; *You are My proof.*
You whom I chose *for special purpose*, My servant,
in order that you would know Me, trust Me, *be faithful to Me*,
Understand that I alone am God; no god was formed before Me,
and there will be no god after Me.

¹¹ **I, I am the Eternal;**
there is no Saviour except for Me,

¹² I alone told *that this victory would happen*. Then I saved you and made it known.
No other god worked among you—You know *the truth*.
You can testify that it is so; as I declare, I alone am God.

¹³ **Indeed, from day *one*, I am He. No one can wrest another from My hand.**
I make things happen; who can turn them around?

(Isaiah 43:1-2,10-13 The Voice)

Prayer

Almighty God,
by whose mercy my life has continued for another year,
I pray that, as my years increase, my sins may not increase.
As age advances,
let me become more open,
more faithful and more trusting in you.
Let me not be distracted by lesser things
from what is truly important.
And if I become infirm as I grow old,
may I not be overwhelmed by self-pity or bitterness.
Continue and increase your loving kindness towards me,
so that, when you finally call me to yourself,
I may enter into eternal happiness with you,
through Jesus Christ my Lord.

Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-84)

It was Dr. Johnson's custom to write a prayer in the early hours of New Year's Day;
he did this every year from 1745 onwards.
AA p.319

Song

Water you turned into wine, opened the eyes of the blind, there's no one like You, none like You!
Into the darkness you shine, out of the ashes we rise, there's no one like You, none like You!
Our God is greater, our God is stronger, God you are higher than any other.
Our God is Healer, Awesome in Power, Our God! Our God!

Into the darkness you shine, out of the ashes we rise, there's no one like You, none like You!
Our God is greater, our God is stronger, God you are higher than any other.
Our God is Healer, Awesome in Power, Our God! Our God!
Our God is greater, our God is stronger, God you are higher than any other.
Our God is Healer, Awesome in Power, Our God! Our God!

And if our God is for us, then who could ever stop us?
And if our God is with us, then what could stand against?
And if our God is for us, then who could ever stop us?
And if our God is with us, then what could stand against, what could stand against?



Our God is greater, our God is stronger, God, you are higher than any other.
Our God is Healer, Awesome in Power, Our God! Our God!
Our God is greater, our God is stronger, God you are higher than any other.
Our God is Healer, Awesome in Power, Our God! Our God!

And if our God is for us, then who could ever stop us?
And if our God is with us, then what could stand against?
And if our God is for us, then who could ever stop us?
And if our God is with us, then what could stand against, then what could stand against?

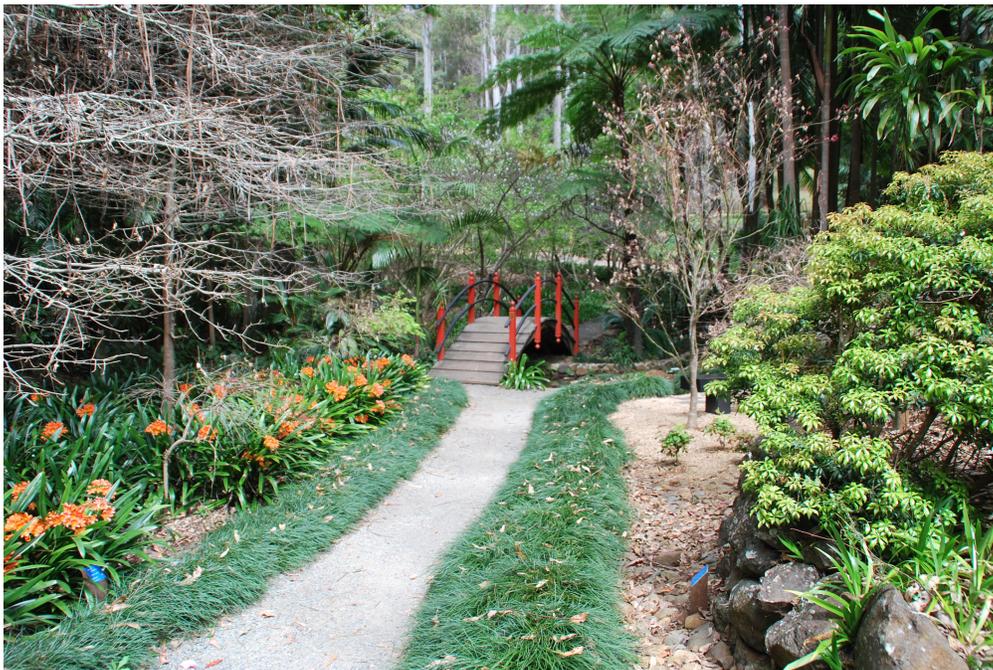
Our God is greater, our God is stronger,
God you are higher than any other.
Our God is Healer, Awesome in Power, Our God! Our God!

Chris Tomlin

Benediction

The love of the Lord Jesus
Draw you to Himself,
The power of the Lord Jesus
Strengthen you in His service,
The joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts;
And the blessing of God Almighty,
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Be among you and remain with you always.

(The Alternative Service Book, 1980, in AA. P.294)



PRAYER REFERENCES

Ashwin, A. (2002). *The Book of a Thousand Prayers*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI.

SONGS

My heart is filled with thankfulness - Stuart Townsend (The Best of Stuart Townsend Live, Track 12)
Still, my soul, be still - Keith and Kristyn Getty (Awaken the Dawn, Track 4)
Our God - Chris Tomlin (And if our God is for us, Track 1)

GOING DEEPER

Here are some suggestions that may help you to engage more deeply with this Scripture verse.

- **Reflect:**

What do the words “Be still and know that I am God” mean to you?

Think for a moment about those words: be still, know. Where do you see them in your life?

Is God calling you to any action so that you might know Him better or better learn to be still?

Think about the times when you find it hard to be still. Why do you think this? How does it impact you getting to know God more deeply?

- **The Bible** is full of God’s invitations to connect more deeply and intimately with Him. Can you think of any examples? Read them through and think about the context and what God is saying. Perhaps the words, so frequently occurring in Scripture, “Do not be afraid...” may be another way of God saying “Be still”. How does our busyness or anxiety hinder us growing in our knowledge of God?
- You could use one of the Bible passages or songs provided in the material to practise **Lectio Divina**.
- **Visualise Scripture!** Read the words of Psalm 46 (or any other Scripture passage that comes to mind) slowly. After each verse, close your eyes and picture what is being described. What do you see, smell, hear? What would it feel like if you were there? How is God speaking to you through this? You could either record this experience in your journal or share it with someone.
- If you enjoy being **creative**, take some paper and some markers/coloured pencils/paints. Think about the year that has just finished and how God has been present with you throughout it. Or reflect on the year ahead – and what you long or hope for in the days to come. Draw or make a collage of some of the thoughts that come to mind. Or ask God to guide your thinking and flip through a magazine or two, tearing/cutting out any pictures or words that excite or inspire you for the year ahead. Make a collage from what you gather.
- Go for a **walk**. Ask God to show you something of His plans and desires for you in the new year. It might be something as simple as seeing a fern frond unfolding, noticing a bird singing loud and cheerfully, or just noticing where He is at work in Creation. Spend time speaking with Him about it.
- If you are **sharing** this retreat day with someone else, spend some time worshipping together and praising God for His presence with you in the past and the hope He gives you for the future.
- If you like to **journal**, make a note of what you have experienced during this retreat time in your journal. A simple way to do this is to:
 - **Thank God** for Who He is and what He is doing in your life
 - **Notice** what is happening around you and in you
 - **Respond** to what God has shown you, by thanking Him, repenting, or recommitting yourself to Him
- **Simply sit in His presence.** We don’t have to do anything to enjoy being in His presence! We are in His will when we are fully and completely in His presence, with our hearts focussed on Him.

EVEN DEEPER

LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is an ancient spiritual practice from the Christian monastic tradition. Its title derives from the Latin words meaning reading and divine/holy. In Lectio Divina, we seek to experience the presence of God through reading and listening, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. Lectio Divina can be practiced both by individuals and in groups.

Practicing Lectio Divina Individually

1. Text

Begin by choosing a section of Scripture that you would like to read and pray. You can choose the text randomly or use a liturgical book, such as The Book of Common Prayer. Try not to set a goal for how much content you will cover; the goal is to listen for God and to experience his presence.

2. Preparation

Do what you must to quiet and prepare yourself to hear from God. If you need to find a quiet room, sit in silence for several minutes, or sit in a comfortable chair, take whatever posture will help you prepare to receive and experience God's presence.

3. Reading/Listening

When you sense that your heart is prepared, begin by slowly reading the passage of Scripture that you have selected. Move slowly through sentences and phrases. As you read, pay attention to what word, phrase, or idea catches your attention.

4. Meditation

Begin to meditate on the word, phrase, or idea that has captured your attention. Repeat it again and again.

Consider:

What thoughts come to mind as you meditate on this word, phrase, or idea?

What are you reminded of in your life?

What does it make you hope for?

Meditation is no easy task—as you try to concentrate don't be disappointed if random thoughts enter your head. As they do, offer them to God.

5. Prayer

Now begin to speak to God. Tell God what word, phrase, or idea captured your attention and what came to mind as you meditated upon it. How is God using this word, phrase, or idea to bless and transform you? Tell God what you have been thinking and feeling as you've listened and meditated. Tell God how you hope this word, phrase, or idea will change your heart to be more like His.

6. Contemplation

Finish by focusing your attention on the fact that God's presence is with you. If as you try to focus on God's presence you sense a need to read the text again, to continue meditating, or to simply continue talking with God, allow yourself to do so. As you do, know that you are in the presence of God.

THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN

Finding the movement of the Spirit in our daily lives as we review our day.

1. Recognize the presence of God

Be still and know that you are with God.

2. Look at your day with gratitude

Acknowledge God in the big and small things of life.

3. Review your day

When or where in the past 24 hours did you feel you were cooperating most fully with God's action in your life? When were you resisting?

Ask yourself

- What habits and life patterns do I notice?
- When did I feel most alive? Most drained of life?
- When did I have the greatest sense of belonging? When did I feel most alone?
- When did I give love? Where did I receive love?
- When did I feel most fully myself? Least myself?
- When did I feel most whole? Most fragmented?

4. Reconcile and Resolve

- Seek forgiveness
- Ask for direction
- Share a concern
- Express gratitude
- Resolve to move forward

Mars Hill Bible Church
marshill.org/teaching/sp

ⁱ From Dietrich Bonhoeffer's poem: *Von guten Maechten...* 1944-45. Translated by Fred Pratt Green