



A PERSONAL RETREAT

During the month of December, we've been encouraging you to focus on living life a little differently and leaning into developing a mindset and a lifestyle of rest.



PSALM 46:10 (NIV)

"He says, 'Be still and know that I am God.'" God tells us to take time to stop and reflect on who He is. In our reflection, we have the opportunity to not only focus on who He is but on who we are becoming as we seek to follow Him.

The concept of an end-of-the-year personal retreat is rooted in the idea that before we step into the new year and a new season of life, we should take some intentional time to look back at the last year and evaluate where we are. Only then can we really look forward to where we want to go. Find a place and take some time to settle your heart and mind as you think about your life. It is a place where you can work out your faith - serving as a break from the noise, busyness, and demands around you. As we do this, we loosen the grip of control and of carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders. We come to God not so much for relief from our circumstances as for refuge in His presence. We rest because we trust. When we pursue God's heart in reflection and prayer, He transforms our own.

This retreat will have four sections, each with prayer, scripture, and reflection questions. Schedule some uninterrupted time and find a quiet place where you can be alone. Grab a Bible, journal, and pen. Write down both the questions and your answers, and have the courage to be honest with yourself. Even though this is a PERSONAL retreat, we encourage you to invite a friend or family member to do it along with you and discuss the insight they received later on together.

We're excited to hear how God uses this experience to encourage, challenge, and inspire you to a deeper sense of His presence and greater steps of faith.

PART 1 – THANKSGIVING AND REFLECTION

Before you begin, pray these words:

Lord, thank you. Thank you for who you are, for how you work in the world, for how You love me, and thank you for this opportunity to grow closer to You. Help my mind to settle, for my thoughts to be clear, for my heart to be pure, and for this time to be honoring to you. Please lead and guide me as I go through this exercise and teach me what you want me to learn.

Read the verses below and let them rest on you. Reread it, sit with it in silence, meditate on its truths, and circle words or phrases that speak to you. Try to rewrite it in your own words.



PSALM 107:8-9(NIV)

"Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things."

Take out your phone. Yes, we are allowing it for this first question, and then we'll ask you to put it away for the rest of the retreat. Scroll through your Instagram profile or phone's album and look through your photographs from the past year.

After you've done that, spend some time reflecting on the following questions:

- What emotions, thoughts, and memories did this exercise produce? What stuck out to you about this past year?
- What were the 3-4 most significant events that transpired in your life this past year? How did you respond to each situation and let it frame your perspective of yourself, others, and God?
- Complete the following sentence: This past year was _____. What makes you describe the past year in this way?
- Where do you need to let the past be the past? What would it look like for you to do so?
- In what ways did you experience God's faithfulness in this last year? In what places did you wrestle with believing that God works everything out for your good?

PART 2 – RECOGNITION AND REPENTANCE

Before you begin, pray these words:

God, there are things of this past year that I wish I could take back - hurtful words, destructive patterns, along with careless thoughts and actions. Those hidden places inside my heart where pride and envy reign, anger simmers, and discontentment stifles, unfortunately, saw the light of day. Everything in me wants to banish them back into the darkness and pretend they never happened or existed. My hesitancy to hide lies in my tendency to get myself right until I feel worthy enough to enter Your presence. Fear keeps me hidden. But that timid act won't lead to freedom; it only leaves me shackled to the past, unable to move forward - returning to lesser things repeatedly.

Neither will I be released from the past by compiling a list of my wrongs and rattling them off to You in a misguided attempt of penance. Instead, You invite me to examine my ways, not to punish me all over again or open up old wounds but to break the chains that hold me captive. Free me from the pressure of measuring Your grace by my guilt. Lead me through this time of confession without being impeded by fear, disgrace, and shame. May I stay the course and not let guilt derail my pursuit of You, nor dictate how I handle my sin and struggles.

It's your tender grace and incomprehensible love that drives my confession. Today, I don't want to merely nod my head in agreement, admitting my wrongdoings, but declare that anything that separates me from You chokes out the vibrant life You promise and hinders my soul's freedom. By aligning my heart with Yours, I recognize that the light of Your love breathes worth into my soul. In Your name, Jesus. Amen.

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PSALM 32:3-7 (NIV)

"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore, let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance"

Take a few moments to reflect and journal on the following questions:

- If you had the opportunity to do this past year over again, what would you do differently and why?
- How are fear and shame keeping you hidden? What areas of struggle can you give over to God and allow others access to come alongside you in your faith journey?
- What are the destructive sin patterns you are bringing into the new year? How are they choking out the full life God promises and hindering your soul's freedom?
- Every struggle begins with a thought. What thought patterns enabled your struggles to flourish over the past year? How can you take these thoughts captive in this next year?

PART 3 – OBEDIENCE AND RECONCILIATION

Before you begin, pray these words:

God, may I fight past regrets by being faithful in the present - not out of duty, drudgery, or obligation, but instead as an instinctive act of trust. Your ways are good, right, and true. Let this confession fuel my obedience and serve as an expression of my dependency. Because I am loved much, I desire to leave a legacy of love.

I want to know You in such a way that my life can't help but look different. Yet, this depth and transformation remain out of reach if I spend my days in the shallow end of the status quo. I recognize that experiencing this intimacy happens not through observing but rather by following, trusting, and obeying. So, may I display the courage to step out of my comfort zone, knowing it is in this unknown place where You shape and mold me into the person You called me to be.

Remind me that giving myself away is the most powerful way to live. Open my eyes for the opportunities awaiting my obedience - let me see the gifts, talents, and resources I can bring to these moments to further Your Kingdom and make Your name known. And then, may I display the courage to respond to this nudging with curiosity, faith, and humility.

You don't need me to do big things for You, but rather invite me to reflect Your heart in those ordinary moments taking place around me. Lead me down the path of fullness and freedom. Direct my steps as Your presence goes before me. In Your name, Jesus. Amen.

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2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-20 (NIV)

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

Take a few moments to reflect and journal on the following questions:

- Our hearts shrink or expand to the size of our most significant concern. How would you describe the current state of your heart? Where is it expanding, and what is causing it to grow? On the other hand, where is your concern focused if you feel your soul is shrinking?
- Where has God granted you influence? What gifts, talents, and resources have God gifted you with that could be used to further God's Kingdom? Would you say you are stewarding your influence and resources well? Why or why not?
- What opportunities lie ahead of you that are awaiting your obedience?
- How would you articulate your next step of faith, and what would it look like for you to take it?

PART 4 – VISION AND FUTURE

Before you begin, pray these words:

God, often what prohibits me from experiencing fresh faith is my fixation with the familiar. I'm fearful of trusting beyond what I already know. I fall for the allure of the misguided security it promises but rarely delivers. Instinctively, I view my circumstances through the lens of how things have always been. I write a story's conclusion before it has even had a chance to begin.

May I replace the hesitation, cynicism, and predictability with a curiosity about how you could move through me if I simply make myself available. I need not be afraid of change but concerned with living a life resigned to remaining the same. Faith never stands still but always sets its gaze on what lies ahead. May I have eyes to see Your will and Your ways.

Over the past year, You've begun a "new thing" inside my heart. I commit to stopping long enough to sense Your presence, hear Your voice, and articulate Your direction. May I be an instrument for forgiveness, grace, and hope in this hurting and lost world. Give me a vision more significant than my ability and effort so I have no choice but to rely on Your faithfulness. Lead me outward and onward to a future defined by trust, faith, and dependency. Remind me that my past faith isn't sufficient for the weight of the future.

I lay this next year and all my hopes, dreams, and plans at Your feet – not my will, but Yours be done. I might not know what this upcoming year holds, but I trust that the One who holds the entire universe in His hands has me. And I'm learning that is enough. In Your name, Jesus. Amen.

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ISAIAH 43:19 (NIV)

"Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

As you near the end of today's personal retreat, we want you to turn the corner towards the year ahead and the person you want to become in this next year. Change is possible, but focus is required since the pace of life won't push you toward transformation and growth. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Without vision, you live unrestrained."

Take a few moments to reflect and journal on the following questions:

- What theme(s) is emerging so far from your time in reflection with God today?
- How would you describe the "new thing" God is doing inside your heart? If you can't sense a new thing occurring, why do you believe your faith remains in neutral?
- How can you put into practice what you are learning? What are some steps you can take to ensure this "new thing" God is doing within you grows and continues to come to life?
- List some key takeaways from your time with the Lord. What are some things you have learned about God, about yourself, and about how you want to step into the new year?

We hope this personal retreat was a rewarding experience for you and that God spoke to your heart today. Congratulations on finishing well so you can start this coming year off strong. Just like you, we are excited to see how God will move in your life over the next 365 days. Even though the future is unknown, you can trust in the consistency of God's character and the fact that His love remains the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Want to take a next step in moving into this coming year? Go to <https://myoneword.org> and learn more.