

PERSONAL RETREAT

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PLANNING YOUR PERSONAL RETREAT



**THE WORLD NEEDS PEOPLE
WHO RETREAT FROM THE
WORLD IN ORDER TO SEE IT
MORE CLEARLY.**

PATRICK CHEN



PLANNING

GETTING STARTED

Giving yourself the gift of retreat is no small task. It is an investment of time, financial resources, and a willingness to engage in silence, stillness, and solitude.

This guide will help you make the most of your investment and support your experience.

Every retreat is a bit different and these tips and instructions will help you whether you are taking one day or ten days away. Take what is useful and leave what isn't.

First Things First

Prepare to be “missing in action” for as long as possible. If you're new to retreats, consider a 24-48 hour time away. Don't plan a personal retreat smack dab in the busiest time of your year with lots of looming deadlines. Try to plan in advance for a time that's a better fit. Try to plan to be away on retreat as long as possible.

Plan to get out of your regular environment... your apartment, your house, your dorm room. You need to be somewhere where you won't be distracted or reminded about all the “other stuff” that needs to get done or people you need to take care of.

Go somewhere comfortable. Maybe it's a hotel, or a remote cabin in the woods, a minimalist AirB&B, or even your own home if you can plan for no distractions. You have to pick what works for you. There are often decent retreat centers around that offer the space you'll need at a reasonable price – just Google it for your area.

If you have to stay in your own home on your own, plan in advance to create a “set-apart” schedule and space. (ie. Don't do any laundry or chores, set up the dining room table as the “craft area, by some special candles and create a prayer space in one of your rooms)

The trick is to be comfortable without too many distractions. If being on your own in a strange place makes you a bit nervous, think through where you'll feel safe. Everyone's wired a bit different so if you can, check out the place beforehand so there are no surprises.



PLANNING

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Go offline. Honestly, take the time to arrange in advance to be completely uninterrupted. Let people know you're gone - tell them not to text you or expect to hear from you. No phone, text, no social media, no email, no nothing. Trust me, you'll thank me for this one.

For those of you with people depending on you to be available, figure out a reasonable plan to be uninterrupted and yet accessible. For example, agree to turn off all your notifications and have your phone in airplane mode, and plan to only check your phone every 4 or 5 hours to see if there is an emergency text. Or, if you're staying at a retreat center or hotel, use the staff as an emergency contact for you.

Break from most, if not all technology – that means no Netflix, podcasts,...and maybe even music. There is no need to be rigid about this. Ultimately you want to create an experience that serves you well, but try and really sink into the unique, rare, and powerful environment of retreat.

It'll take a bit of getting used to, but you may be surprised how effective this is. Don't worry if you feel you are "coming out of your skin" as you settle into the silence. This is really the de-cluttering effect of not being distracted. It can be a challenge at first, so be gentle with yourself. If you need to play light music in the background to ease yourself into the quiet, go for it!

Set reasonable expectations. In other words – be kind to yourself. Go into your retreat with a sense of expectation but also with a manageable agenda. It's not helpful if you feel like you have to accomplish something on your retreat. It's about the experience, not an accomplishment.

Let whatever happens, happen. If it's your first time doing something like this, just learning what it's like to be with yourself is the best lesson you can walk away with. Any experience you have will serve you in unexpected ways and will support you when you choose to go on another retreat in the future.

Do it alone. Is that stating the obvious? This isn't a spa weekend with your best friend. While I'm all for that sort of get-away, this is actually something quite different. We rarely have time like this on our own. It may feel strange, but embrace it!

Your retreat is yours! Enjoy it, learn from it, and experience it fully!

May you find your Self rooted and secure in Love.

-Christa



SCHEDULE

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

Day 1

If possible, try to take the drive to the retreat location as part of your retreat. See it as the first part of your retreat - a set apart space away from your "regular life".

If you can, try to have as many nights away as possible. In other words, if you can take the time, and can afford the extra cost, it's best to arrive in the evening the night before your retreat day, so you can wake up and spend the entire day in your retreat zone.

Settle into your new digs. Unpack your suitcase, set up your space. Take a walk around. Do what you need to do to get comfortable with your new surroundings.

Take a moment and figure out if you've forgotten anything and either get it or make peace without it.

Send your last text, check your last email, and turn off your devices if you haven't already done so.

Now it's time to start getting used to the slow and the quiet...don't stress out if you're feeling uneasy. It takes some time to de-clutter from the noise and the fast pace (both externally and internally). It's completely normal to feel like you're coming out of your skin a bit.

Thoughts and feelings will be swirling and some you haven't had in a while may rise within you. Again, this is completely normal and a necessary part of moving into greater stillness and silence.

The temptation may be to distract. Maybe it's time to take a walk or listen to some music. Ease into any "processing". You don't need to pull out your books and journal right away. Maybe the best thing is to go to bed and get a good sleep.

Unless you're really keen and want to catch the sunrise, don't set an alarm and just let your body sleep for as long as you need. This may be the best gift you give yourself over your retreat days. The same goes for all the following mornings if you're staying more than one night!

**"In difficult times,
carry something
beautiful in
your heart."**

Blaise Pascal

SCHEDULE

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

Day 2 & Beyond

The day is yours! Let it unfold as it should. Take a walk, eat well, and sleep if you need to. This is a full day to just be with yourself – unmasked, and with the Divine.

Check out some of my "On Retreat Ideas" to give you some ideas on how you may want to spend some of your retreat time.

To contemplate means "to gaze at". Your retreat is an opportunity to gaze at your life, to gaze at God, and to allow yourself to be gazed at by the Holy & Sacred. If you are a person of faith, this is an opportunity to slow down so you can wake up to the voice of the Divine within you.

Your Last Day

Chances are you'll wake up with a sense of how the day will go, what you want to focus on, given how your previous retreat day(s) have gone.

Set your alarm for when you have one hour left before you need to start packing up to leave. This might be the only function your phone has during your retreat. You will likely only need ½ hour or less to "clean and pack up", so when the alarm goes off, you can move into your final half-hour of retreat, easing yourself gently "back", and then you can pack up to leave.

Setting an alarm is really to help you not have to check your watch and pull yourself out of the moment while on retreat...the day can unfold naturally as it should.

Take time to record any thoughts/feelings that seem to be important to take away with you.

Ask yourself:

- *Should I talk to someone close to me about what I experienced on retreat?*
- *Should I be making an appointment with a therapist, coach, or spiritual director when I return?*
- *Do I need to research something that I've become curious about?*
- *Do I want to start or stop something in my routine to cultivate what transpired on this retreat?*

Start packing up with enough time to return home without rushing.

**"God only needs
one thing: our
willingness to be
loved infinitely"**

Thomas Keating



SCHEDULE

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

Returning Home

Depending on how long you've been away, you'll want to pay special attention to "re-entry".

If you're returning to a family and they are expecting you to cook upon your return (whether you're taking one or more days away), perhaps you can plan the meal in advance, or get take out on your way back home. Do a little bit of "returning home" planning before you leave on retreat so you can maintain as much of the retreat frame of mind as possible.

If you're returning to a house full of people, be gentle with yourself and with them - you may find yourself simultaneously grateful to be near them, and resentful of the responsibility, obligation, and inability to find quiet!

Once at home, ease back into things as best you can and plan to get another good night's sleep. If possible, remain in the "retreat" head and heart space as long as possible.

Ask yourself if getting back online or checking social media can wait until tomorrow. Gift yourself the gift of remaining unplugged from technology a bit longer.

Make a note to check in with yourself a few days after your retreat. What is your soul wanting you to remember? Is there anything you are forgetting that could be brought back into focus? Is there someone you should be sharing your experience with?

**"God comes to
you disguised
as your life"**

Paula D'Arcy



PACKING LIST

WHAT NOT TO FORGET

Packing Light | Chances are no one will see you (or care if they do), so let this be a low maintenance time for you. Pack comfortable clothes, limit "beauty products".

Alarm Clock | I'm not suggesting you set an alarm in the mornings (quite the opposite actually), but if you have retreat center meal times you need to follow, or you don't want to keep checking your clock for certain things, you can set an alarm to go off. If you'd like to have one in your room without being distracted by your phone, bring an "old-school" one to plug-in.

Food | Healthy snacks and drinks. Plan to eat simple, but eat well. If you're at a retreat center, there will be planned mealtimes, so you may want to bring a few of your own snacks.

Unless you want to incorporate a formal fast into your retreat, it's best to think through how you'll eat over the days you are on retreat. When you turn everything else off and are quiet with yourself, your body will do everything it can to distract you. Don't deprive yourself, but don't get stuck eating junk that'll leave you uncomfortable. If you like to cook and the place you're staying accommodates this, plan to make your own meals as a mindful expression of creativity.

Only incorporate a fast from eating if you are experienced with retreating in silence. A fast of any kind is designed to clear the clutter in order to connect with Love. There is no need to feel punished or parched as you're trying to connect with your deepest Self.

Clothing | Pack appropriate outdoor walking clothes that suit the weather. Even if you don't consider yourself an outdoors person, you will likely find great connections between the natural world and the inner terrain of your life. Pack extra layers and a couple of pairs of shoes. Don't forget the umbrella...an intentional walk in the rain might be your best gift!

"I go to nature to be soothed, healed, and have my senses put in order."

John Muir



PACKING LIST

CONTINUED

Books & Things | Bring a few books of inspiration, but NOT a book you feel you "must" read. The more "shoulds" you bring into the retreat, the less retreat you'll have. Consider bringing some poetry, a sketchbook, or a craft of some kind even if it's not something you'd normally gravitate towards – whatever will help you get in touch with the inner terrain of your life and help you slow down and wake up to what is really real.

Some people have bought a water-color kit, brought their knitting or wood carving, and even a sketchbook when they have never really touched pencil to paper before. Experiment and enjoy!

Something to Take Notes | Be sure to bring something to capture your thoughts - a journal, your computer...both? Just remember that your computer may be a place with too many distractions. At the very least, turn your wireless off if you're taking notes on your device.

Headphones/Earbuds | If you decide you want to listen to some quiet music at times, but you're in a quiet retreat center environment, you'll need these.

Special Amenities | Make this retreat special. Truly, when do you get the opportunity to really rest and reflect in silence? Bring candles, Epsom salts for a bath, essential oils, a special blanket, or your own pillow - whatever will make you comfortable.

Earplugs | Depending on your sleeping habits and where your retreat is, you may want to ensure a good night's sleep in a strange new place.

Of course, this is not an exhaustive list of things to bring. Take a moment and consider what will make you feel comfortable in new surroundings, and look at it through the lens of SIMPLICITY. You don't need to pack everything. In fact, things you find missing on your retreat may be very instructive and a doorway into your soul.

"We find God in ourselves and we find ourselves in God."

Teresa of Avila



ON-RETREAT

IDEAS

Give yourself the gift of practicing silence, stillness, and solitude. Don't fill every moment with your "to-do's" or "processing your agenda". Just be.

Walk | Go for a good long walk or move your body with some yoga or light stretching. Consider checking out the self-guided walking reflections on the [SoulPlay website](#).

Sleep | Catch up on the sleep you need! You're not wasting your retreat if it's deep restful sleep.

Meditate | Not sure how? Consider trying a few guided meditations before you go on the free *Insight Timer App* and bring it with you.

Reflect | Bring a few poems or inspirational readings. Take time to chew on it and let it metabolize into your heart and mind. Read and reflect for quality, not quantity.

Create | Paint, draw, knit, write—do something that expresses what is in you.

Journal | Maybe it's been a while since you've paid some attention to your soul. Take time to notice what is arising and jot it down.

Capture | You'll likely want to take some pictures. Do this mindfully. Pay attention to what is drawing you into taking "its" picture, as opposed to you being driven to consume everything around you in photos. AND...don't post on social media while you are on retreat - your gaze and energy should be turned inward, not out.

Compose | Write a blessing from the voice of your soul, and imagine the Divine speaking it over you (for more ideas like this, you can contact Christa directly).

Pray | You may have a book of prayers or sacred scripture you want to use to help you focus your time. Just being in deep silence can be a powerful act of prayer.

Many people are tempted to bring A LOT of resources and things on their retreat for fear they will be bored or don't have everything they might need at the moment.

Consider this as a way to control what feels scarce. The truth is, the slow, quiet time alone can be abundantly fruitful. Take only a few things and trust you'll have what you need.

**"Your soul is not
in your body, your
body is in
your soul."**

**Pierre Teilhard
Dejardin**



A FINAL WORD ABOUT SLOW & QUIET

COPING WELL ON RETREAT

When you go away on a personal retreat, time will feel as if it's slowing down. The stimulus around you is diminished, and the energy you expend is steady and stable. This takes some getting used to. You may find yourself gripping and grasping for speed, stimulus, and energy. This is normal. Remember, it takes a bit of time to move into a new rhythm.

Extroverted temperaments may have more of a challenge than those wired as introverts...and yet, this is not a permission slip out of engaging in silence.

If you're a doer-fixer-achiever type, you may also struggle in your own unique way with the slow-down.

The best thing you can do is to stick with it and in it. Stay curious, non-judgemental, and self-compassionate about how you're feeling, how you'd like to cope with the slow and quiet, and what your soul is inviting you to.

Oftentimes, once you move through the discomfort, you'll find that you've entered a new, deeper inner quiet and attunement. Remember, staying present to the present moment is the only way to experience the presence of God.

Some thoughts and feelings that arise can be troubling. When we pay attention to these places that have been neglected and pushed out of focus, we sometimes feel vulnerable and fragile with what is coming forward.

Take good care of yourself. If you find that your thoughts and feelings are moving you into a significant place of distress, or re-traumatizing you on some level, it's best to ease out of your retreat, particularly if you are not formally being accompanied by a coach or spiritual director.

If you find that you really were not able to settle into the stillness and silence, don't beat yourself up. It's possible that the experience was new for you and takes getting used to, (practice doesn't make perfect, it just makes us present!). Simply see it as instructive - What made it difficult? What was occupying your mental and emotional energy? Would you do anything differently next time?

**"Attention is the
beginning of
devotion."**

Mary Oliver

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR RETREAT

INVESTING IN YOUR INNER LIFE

Going on a personal retreat is an excellent way to slow down and listen to your soul. If you find there are thoughts and feelings you haven't experienced in a while, and you want to have someone to help you process and support you afterward consider meeting with a therapist, a spiritual director, or a coach.

If you have the opportunity to go on a "directed retreat" (meaning you are making arrangements to meet with a spiritual director during your retreat), take full advantage of this type of companionship. Some retreat centers offer directed retreats, and if not, you can always contact a spiritual director to see if they will accompany you (over the phone/zoom meeting) while you are on retreat.

There are plenty of additional resources to guide you:

- contemplative practices
- journal prompts
- reading list
- walking meditations
- music playlist
- prayers you can use
- debrief questions to use after your retreat

If you are wanting to discuss these resources, or speak with a spiritual director before, during, and/or after your retreat, contact Christa Hesselink at [SoulPlay.ca/contact](https://www.soulplay.ca/contact)

Please consider a "thank you" donation for use of this resource: www.soulplay.ca/donate

