

# Christian Spiritual Exercises

## “Entering into Silence And Solitude and Being Trained”

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 for you to be silent and alone. Select some of the suggestions that resonate with you.



Prayerfully take 3-5 minutes to intentionally place yourself in God’s presence and become consciously aware that he is with you. Although you are by yourself, you are not alone—the triune God is with you. From Francis deSalle’s, *Introduction to the Devout Life*:

*Lord, you fill the universe.*

Psalm 139 says that YOU fill the universe- where could I go from your Spirit? Where could I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there, if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea...Lord, you are there. Lord, you fill the universe (and the earth) with your presence.

*Lord, you are here.*

In fact, Paul told the people on Mars Hill (Acts 17), that we live and move and have our being in you. We live in your presence. I am in your presence right now. Lord, you fill the universe and you are here.

*Lord, you are right here beside me.*

Your Word also says that Jesus will never leave us...never leave us. He is here, with us as we are gathered together, here in our midst, here in the seat next to me. Here with me. Lord, you fill the universe, and you are present here with us, with me, O Lord, right next to me.

*Lord, you indwell me.*

Lord, you also tell us in your Word that you indwell us with your Holy Spirit. Paul says in Romans 8, the Spirit of God lives in believers. And indeed you do. Just as the air we breathe in fills our lungs with oxygen which then nourishes every cell of our body (take a long slow breath as you ponder this truth) so your Spirit indwells me and knows me.

Lord, you fill the universe, you are here, present with me, and you indwell me. Truly, Lord, I live in YOU and you live in ME. (Stay awhile, prayerfully pondering this truth.)



Read three times Zephaniah 3:17. Then try to memorize it as you take a walk. Once it’s memorized, make it your personal prayer. You might use your hands and act out what the Lord is

saying to you (some examples: clench your fist as if you are holding on to something tightly...then let it go; throw it away; set your concern down on a rock and walk away).

The Lord your God is with you,  
He is mighty to save.  
He will take great delight in you,  
He will quiet you with his love,  
He will rejoice over you with singing.

Continue to walk and intentionally try to stay focused entirely on the Lord, delighting in him, being filled with thankfulness and gratitude and praise for who he is and all that he has done for you. If you find yourself thinking about something else, that's part of the process. Just refocus by reciting the verse and continue to walk.

Medical doctors tell us that it is possible to reduce our feelings of anxiety and stress by slowing down our breathing. Take 5-10 seconds to inhale and then 5-10 seconds to exhale. Try this and see if it helps you to feel more relaxed as you retreat.

✪

Read a passage of Scripture (perhaps Isaiah 30:15-22). Does a phrase stand out? Repeat that phrase to God and sit in his presence and enjoy the Word he has spoken to you.

✪

Try paraphrasing a passage and as you do, insert examples from our modern day experiences. You might want to use Habakkuk's Prayer as a guide as you write your own prayer

### **Habakkuk's Prayer**

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On *shigionoth*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> LORD, I have heard of your fame;  
I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD.  
Repeat them in our day,  
in our time make them known;  
in wrath remember mercy.

<sup>3</sup> God came from Teman,  
the Holy One from Mount Paran.<sup>t</sup>  
His glory covered the heavens  
and his praise filled the earth.

<sup>4</sup> His splendor was like the sunrise;  
rays flashed from his hand,  
where his power was hidden.

<sup>5</sup> Plague went before him;  
pestilence followed his steps.

<sup>6</sup> He stood, and shook the earth;  
he looked, and made the nations tremble.  
The ancient mountains crumbled  
and the age-old hills collapsed—

but he marches on forever.  
<sup>7</sup> I saw the tents of Cushan in distress,  
the dwellings of Midian in anguish.

<sup>8</sup> Were you angry with the rivers, LORD?  
Was your wrath against the streams?  
Did you rage against the sea  
when you rode your horses  
and your chariots to victory?

<sup>9</sup> You uncovered your bow,  
you called for many arrows.  
You split the earth with rivers;  
<sup>10</sup> the mountains saw you and writhed.  
Torrents of water swept by;  
the deep roared  
and lifted its waves on high.

<sup>11</sup> Sun and moon stood still in the heavens  
at the glint of your flying arrows,  
at the lightning of your flashing spear.

<sup>12</sup> In wrath you strode through the earth  
and in anger you threshed the nations.

<sup>13</sup> You came out to deliver your people,  
to save your anointed one.  
You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness,  
you stripped him from head to foot.

<sup>14</sup> With his own spear you pierced his head  
when his warriors stormed out to scatter us,  
gloating as though about to devour  
the wretched who were in hiding.

<sup>15</sup> You trampled the sea with your horses,  
churning the great waters.

<sup>16</sup> I heard and my heart pounded,  
my lips quivered at the sound;  
decay crept into my bones,  
and my legs trembled.  
Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity  
to come on the nation invading us.

<sup>17</sup> Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
<sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

<sup>19</sup> The Sovereign LORD is my strength;

he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to tread on the heights.

For the director of music. On my stringed instruments. <sup>1</sup>

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Sit in silence and ask *God* some questions:

What do I need to know?

How have I disappointed you?

What am I doing that pleases you?

If nothing comes, that's okay. If something comes to mind that's not right, confess it. Sit and enjoy being with the Father and try to stay focused on his love for you.

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Sing a song in your heart about quiet and solitude. (*I Come to the Garden alone...*)

✪

What truth about the Lord do you want to ponder over the next few days? (I begin wanting to know at my core that God is love and that I am his deeply loved child. If you aren't sure where to begin, we all have a deep longing in our inmost being to know we are loved.) Is there a specific focus that you are being drawn to?

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Write down five reasons that prevent you from being intimate with God. Then ask the Lord, "What is the truth you want me to know about these things that I'm believing?"<sup>2</sup>

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Take a stroll and intentionally look for the fingerprints of Deity in his creation. Pause, get down low, enjoy a butterfly or a wild flower up close, or listen to the rustle of the grass in the wind. Listen to the river. Sit a while. Feel the breeze. Drink in the Lord. Linger over a bird. Let your mind be wooed away from the stuff on the other side of the hedge noticing things here. Simply enjoy the pleasures of God's creation and contemplate the goodness of the Lord. Begin by enjoying the little creatures that creep along the path. As C.S. Lewis writes, "after all, these true pleasures are "shafts of the GLORY" Through nature, we can experience a tiny ray of God, we can experience a tiny theophany, and draw near to him.

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Consider for a long while the passion of Christ by reading the end of the gospels. Consider his silence. What can you learn from him? Then consider the third chapter of James.

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*. (2011). (Hab 3:1–19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>2</sup> An exercise shared with me by Betsy Stowe



Begin copying selected portions of Scripture. If you don't know where to begin, try Isaiah.

The Preacher writes, "There's a time to speak and time to be silent" (Ecc 3:7). When should we speak? When should we be silent? You might want to ponder these questions given your specific circumstances. Put the verse on a little card so you can put it where it can serve as a daily reminder.

Read Rev. 4-8 and listen to the sounds of heaven. When was heaven silent? Why?

*And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. —Rev. 8:1*



What does this mean for you: "The sole purpose of solitude is knowing God, and those who know God will care for God's children...It is out of solitude, out of being authentically present to God, that the deepest care for God's creatures comes."<sup>3</sup>



Network of Evangelical Women in Ministry  
10004 Cork Oak Circle  
Oakdale, CA 95361  
World Wide Web: [www.newim.org](http://www.newim.org)  
E-mail: [info@newim.org](mailto:info@newim.org)

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<sup>3</sup> David Rensberger, "The Holiness of Winter" Weavings, November/December 1996, p. 40.