

“A friendly and thorough guide to crafting your own soul space. For every woman living a cram-jammed, depleted life, *Getaway with God: The Everywoman’s Guide to Personal Retreat* taps our deep longing for space of our own. In a world with lots of noise and little quiet, the personal retreat becomes a countercultural—and life-giving—choice. Let Letitia Suk walk you through your doubts, fears, questions, and reticence. Don’t wait. Get the book and get away with God. Your soul—and all the people in your life—will thank you.”

Jane Rubietta, international speaker, author of 19 books, including *Resting Place: A Personal Guide to Spiritual Retreats* and *Worry Less So You Can Live More*

“Have you ever thought, *I need to get away and take a retreat with Jesus?* Then all those counter thoughts hit you: *How will I spend the time? Where will I go? How can I fit anything else in? How can we afford it?* Letitia Suk, out of the rich meditative practices of her life, has provided the answers to all your concerns in this wondrously meticulous guide. The book is part gentle wisdom shared by an experienced and gifted life mentor and part remarkable memoir drawn out of the author’s own life, and it addresses any and every question that could be raised by those of us who think, *Should do but how to?* I have been stuck for two days due to weather systems trying to get home from Dallas to Chicago, but thanks to Letitia, I am making this a spiritual retreat and am now sitting in the sun with almost no one near me but Jesus. Thank you, Letitia. *Getaway with God* is a gem!”

Karen Burton Mains, director of Hungry Souls

“As women, we can get so caught up in taking care of others and in our to-do lists that we lose track of nurturing the most important relationship of all—the one with God. This book is a gentle, beautiful invitation to say yes to the Lord’s invitation to come with him to a quiet place. Letitia provides step-by-step instructions to those who desire them, but also encourages women to find their own retreat path. She shares her own journey with humility and grace. It’s a book any woman at any stage of life or spirituality will learn from and savor.”

Melanie Rigney, author of *Blessed Are You: Finding Inspiration from Our Sisters in Faith*

Getaway with God

The EVERYWOMAN'S GUIDE
to PERSONAL RETREAT

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Letitia Suk

Getaway with God: The Everywoman's Guide to Personal Retreat

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*To Thomas,
for always believing.*

*And my granddaughters,
Aaliyah, Lydia, and Camila,
to start you on your way.*



*Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place
and get some rest.*

JESUS (MARK 6:31)



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Tom, always Tom, whose love and support daily sustain me.

To Jesus: thanks for the invitation. Glad I RSVP'd yes.

DEAR FRIEND

What if you could plug your soul in for a long recharge like you do your phone every night? If you're like me, the "juice" on my phone can slide into the red zone without me even noticing. An emergency-like response sets in as I desperately grab the charger to plug back into the power. Staying connected to the source feels critical. And that's just for a phone.

Our souls work like that too—draining constantly throughout the day, even more during times of crisis. As with the phone, we may not be aware of the energy loss until we are nearly empty.

How do you know when you are skirting into the red zone? See if you can answer yes to any of these questions:

Are you weary of the rush to the next day?

Do you feel stretched edge to edge?

Are you overbooked and overwhelmed?

Do you rarely leave room for margin in which to refuel?

Do you long for time to just *be* with God?

I'm raising my hand and so are countless other women, whether busy moms or active executives, new believers or lifetime church members. "I need time with Jesus" echoes in small groups, on social networking sites, in coffee shops, and in blog posts. We're all hungry for a soul recharge: extended time alone with God.

In spite of the expressed need, life totally gets in the way, and the timeless remedy of just getting up a little earlier to fit it all in is no longer effective. In fact, most of us try and try to squeeze in time

for Jesus and finally quit, feeling like failures. We long for more, but we're out of ideas about how to attain it. Sound familiar?

Getting away with God on a personal retreat works like that overnight charge. We plug into the source of all life and let him fill us to the brim. One full charge can last a long time as we resume the race set before us. Hope returns, peace floods in, and the mental fog lifts. Something about hanging out with the creator of the universe brings things into perspective.

Enticed but skeptical, right? Don't worry, I'll address your concerns; I've had them all myself. *Getaway with God: The Everywoman's Guide to Personal Retreat* tells my story and invites you to begin to write your own. Come along with me. I will show you the way to the renewal and spiritual intimacy you long for. You'll be ready for an encounter with God that can fill you with more joy and blessing than you've imagined could be yours.

Ready? Pull up a chair.

Warm regards,

Tish

PS: In the early stages of writing this book, I stopped by a party my neighbor threw for her girlfriends. I didn't know anyone else there, but the host and I engaged in conversation with a woman I met. Instead of the usual chitchat, she began telling me how she occasionally attends church and is figuring out her own faith. She felt a strong need to "get away" on a retreat type of experience to sort it all out. She brought it up, not me.

I laughed inside at God's timing and then filled her in on my passion for inviting women to do just that: get away and sort it all out. My new friend told me to hurry up and write the book. It truly seemed like a divine encounter to both of us.

This book is for her and you and all the women who long to get away with God and need a girlfriend to show them the way.

PART 1

*You Can Do
This!*

HOW IT BEGAN

An Introduction

Like many of us, I already spend a few weekends a year retreating: family retreats, all-church retreats, small group retreats, women's retreats, and marriage retreats. By definition, a retreat offers time to come away from the day-to-day demands and focus on our relationship with God.

Common themes usually include singing, plentiful (and sometimes good) food, inspiring messages, and *lots* of people. Retreats provide great opportunities for strengthening relationships, renewing vision, and letting someone else cook for a change. Usually we return home feeling encouraged, energized, and probably in need of some sleep.

Now, I love the girlfriend time at the retreats, the laughing, the skits and snacks, and the teachings. Some women freely admit to really not caring who is teaching; they just like leaving home. But while most of my weekend experiences enriched my relationships with my family and friends, time *alone* with God at these events often seemed minimal and tacked on at the beginning or end of a long day.

In spite of all the fun and great camaraderie, I often still felt in need of a retreat.

In the early years of our young church, I attended one of these large group retreats at a local convent. While browsing the book area, I picked up a brochure for the facility and noticed “Private retreats available” listed among the amenities. Right away I was intrigued, but I was unsure what a “private” retreat would be. The idea suggested an unhurried time to pray, read, and just enjoy being with God at my own pace.

I was ready to sign up, but I felt clueless about how to spend twenty-four hours without a retreat schedule in hand. So I stuck the brochure in my bag and took it home.

A few months later, while seeking God about the direction of my life and not hearing much back, I pulled out the brochure. Immediately, myriad questions flooded my mind:

If I do this, will I just pray the whole time?

Should I fast?

What does it mean to “wait on God”?

What if I get bored?

How spiritual do I have to be to try this?

Then the possibilities began to emerge—time *alone*, time to really seek God, a chance to finish that Bible study I started at the beginning of the year, an opportunity to sort out the next season of my life. Way too much agenda for one retreat. I called the facility and made a reservation.

For the next nearly thirty-five years I went back once or twice a year. First to that convent until it was torn down for a housing development. Then other places. Some years I went to a bed-and-breakfast; other times, to a friend’s empty-during-the-day apartment. The “where” wasn’t as important as just showing up to hang out with Jesus.

Time after time, year after year, I came away filled with a renewed sense of purpose, clarity of vision, trust in God's ability to untie all the knots of my life, and an overwhelming sense of being loved. Can you see why I kept making the reservation? Part 1 of this book tells you step-by-step how to design and experience your own short retreat so you can enjoy similar benefits.

Fast-forward to six months into my sixtieth year. I wondered how God viewed my life so far. I still anticipated the full actualization of all his plans for me, but life was moving fast, and I yearned for an opportunity to take a long look at where I had been and where I was headed.

My journals of the previous few years reflected common transitions in this season of life: the launching of children, family weddings, the death of a parent, some dreams realized and others laid to rest. The journals contained my angst about stuck points in my life and my wonderings about what was next.

I longed for a chance to identify themes in my life's journey as well as plan for what I hope will be several more decades of service to God's kingdom and deep enjoyment of life. But that process never seemed to fit into a Sunday afternoon. Turns out I didn't have to cram it into a few hours as God invited me to spend five luscious days away with him for some of the most transformative moments of my life. But now I'm getting ahead of myself . . .

THE BASICS

Answering Your Questions

Clutching my overstuffed suitcase in one hand while balancing my purse and additional “just in case I have time” bag in the other, I managed to wrest a hand free to ring the bell of a large retreat facility near my home. The year was 1977, and I was on the doorstep of my first personal retreat, carrying plenty of excitement, a bit of anxiety, and way too much stuff.

In the early evening, I had driven about thirty minutes to the same convent where my church had its retreat. This time, though, instead of heading to the group area, the nuns directed me to their newly renovated wing set aside specifically for personal retreats. This section contained nine small rooms, each furnished with a bed covered with a colorful spread, a small desk and chair, another comfy chair for sitting, plenty of light, and a sink. Decorative touches and new carpeting added to the inviting atmosphere. Down the hall was a lounge area set up like a large living room, and a common bathroom.

I have always enjoyed having some lovely personal space, and this fit the bill perfectly. The sister who led me to my room invited me to

walk the grounds, visit the chapel, and help myself to tea and cookies in the basement snack room anytime. I did all the above.

I arrived after dinner (no fasting) but planned on eating breakfast and lunch the next day with any other retreatants in the private dining room. Turns out I was the only one there. When I showed up for breakfast, a plate of hot, delicious food awaited me along with a pot of hot water for my tea. I saw no one come or go, so it was like the angels had dropped off the provisions.

I spent the rest of the morning praying, reading, journaling, and walking through the beautiful grounds in the back among apple trees and grapevines. I was surprised but delighted to see that the same angels had dropped off my lunch, as once again I saw no one else around. After lunch I took a nap and then another walk. I spent the last hour of my first retreat reflecting on my time there and the new perspective on my life I had gained from it. The twenty-two hours away felt like two weeks, and I couldn't wait to come back.

Thirty-five-plus years of personal retreats later, I want to invite you to come along. I hope you can envision us having a cup of tea together while I share with you more of my story and fill you in on how delightful a getaway with God can be.

What Is a Personal Retreat?

You probably have a few questions, so let's start with those.

I like the definition Ben Campbell Johnson and Paul Lang offer in their book, *Time Away: A Guide for Personal Retreat*: "Retreat is a temporary withdrawal to be renewed, to regroup, and to find the strength you need to go forward."¹ The *personal* part means you go by yourself. This is more than an afternoon free time at your church's annual women's retreat.

Getaways with God are not just for the "super-spiritual" girls. In fact, if you want to go on a retreat just to get some time alone, that's okay. Don't confuse a retreat with a vacation, though. A retreat

beckons you to snuggle up with God and let him love on you. Save the shopping and movie watching for another time.

This is not a “nun for a day” program; it is an intimate time hanging out with the One who knows you better than anyone else and loves you like crazy. Try thinking of your personal retreat like a spiritual spa. Doesn’t that sound inviting? For a day or two, you check yourself into a place to rest, pray, listen to God, feel his love, take a walk, and enjoy a nap or two.

While most women I know would drool at the opportunity to have even an afternoon off from their responsibilities, somehow the notion of actually making it happen can be somewhat intimidating. Beloved women of God who would not hesitate to take a day of shopping if someone offered often have a hard time taking that very same time to go on a retreat. Perhaps it’s because the concept seems so mysterious. But the rewards of a retreat last much longer than the new items purchased at the mall.

Why Do I Need One?

Most women need an urgent care facility for their weary souls. Busyness, fatigue, family issues, and work crises stack on top of each other like a pile of the old-fashioned pick-up sticks. We can get good at detangling the demands from time to time, but not for long. One set of emergencies flows into the next, and even the quiet days can be fraught with anxious thoughts.

A lot of women are sure some break in the schedule is just a week or two away. As soon as the kids are either out of school or back in, or the project at work is finished, or we take our vacation, or we get home from our vacation, or the renovations are done, or the paper gets turned in, or the campaign is over . . . *then* we can take a break. We all know how that usually works out. A whole new set of circumstances is waiting in line—and the break gets put off once again.

Caffeine breaks, chocolate, and trips to the mall are like taking an

aspirin for a migraine. Taking a personal retreat, on the other hand, is like hooking up to an IV of grace and rest. Nothing is more restorative than spending a day with Jesus and feeling his love.

Sure, a lot of women can get by without a personal retreat. But are you a “get by” girl or a “go after” girl? Ladies, we are responsible for our own spiritual practices. Our pastor, husband, mom, or friend can’t make our renewal happen. Just as it’s up to us to read our Bible, only we can orchestrate a day or two away with Jesus.

what other women have to say

“I love going on personal retreats, because it is extended time with just me and God with no distractions. It’s a chance to rest in God’s presence, read his Word, pray, and journal for extended uninterrupted periods of time. It’s also a chance to hear from him without the distractions of life.”—Janice

“I am involved in intense, demanding ministry with traumatized, homeless, and exploited women in an impoverished inner-city neighborhood. I need retreat time on a regular basis to rest and hear from God.”—Julia

“We often separate body and spirit during the day, and personal retreats are wonderful, necessary ways to unite those two again so we can live as whole, connected people.”—Cheryl

Where Do I Go?

Many venues can work for a getaway with God. The essential component is space to be alone without interruptions. My first few years of taking retreats led me back to the previously mentioned Catholic convent. Sadly, the convent eventually came down so new homes could be built. My friends and I still grieve the loss. Fortunately, other area convents and monasteries still exist, and I visit most of them.

If you are on a tight budget, a convent or retreat facility usually

fits the bill for anonymity and few distractions. Check the website or call ahead to see if they serve meals and if special requests can be accommodated. Do they have a fridge available for you to bring your own meals? Is there a place to walk? Is silence the norm? Appendix E provides a list of links for retreat centers.

Sometimes you might prefer a hotel-like environment. A dear friend of mine waits for the winter hotel specials in Chicago and plans her retreat for that time. I discovered a charming bed-and-breakfast about an hour's train ride from my home that became my retreat venue for a few years. Silence was not to be had, but there was a lot of quiet.

For a no-cost retreat, consider asking a friend who is gone during the day if you can use her place, or trade homes with a friend for a weekend. When my children were starting morning programs in school, I asked a neighbor from church if I could use her apartment for a morning retreat while she was downtown at work. I didn't have the luxury of an overnight or even a full day, but the change of venue and close proximity created just the place I needed.

An outside retreat at a public garden, large park, or on the beach can work in the right kind of weather for a shorter retreat. Bring along something comfortable to sit on and create your own sacred space.

One word of caution: Staying home to retreat may seem like an ideal solution. But if possible, get out of your house. Too many distractions of undone chores, ringing phones, and chicken to thaw out for dinner can derail the best of plans.

what other women have to say

“I have found it easiest to connect with the Lord and quiet myself if I am somewhere other than my home. There is a spirituality center out in the country, about seventy miles from my house. I went there for part of Thanksgiving last year. That to me was perfection. So quiet you could hear crickets, so dark you could see the stars at night, so alone, other than with the Lord.”—Melanie

“I decided to take my retreat at a hotel in Michigan. I wanted to be by the lake, wanted to go to a place I knew, and wanted to travel less rather than more.”—Jean

How Do I Get Ready for a Retreat?

Preparing for a retreat is just like getting ready for any other trip. Some women never end up going because it seems like too much trouble, but it doesn't have to be. Careful planning, as with any other event or project, can simplify the process of leaving.

I have found these steps helpful to prepare for my retreats:

1. Start a conversation with those who would be most affected by your absence: your husband, children, roommates, and employer. Of course, if you are taking a one-day retreat, there will likely not be much change in the day-to-day.
2. Unless you feel a compelling reason to go NOW, choose a time that fits relatively well with the rest of your life. There will be no perfect time to go, so don't wait more than a week from your decision to book a place. Often it works well to plan the retreat a month or so out, when your schedule looks more open, and then book other events around it.
3. Make arrangements for your absence. Just as with any trip, provide for the needs of your family, pets, and colleagues. Provide an emergency number, but clarify that it is for a true emergency, not a chat. I know—that's a hard one for those of us who are so used to being available 24/7.
4. Choose your transportation. Are you driving? Taking public transportation? Getting a ride with a friend? Walking or biking? Decide how you want to get there, and have a backup plan in mind in case of car repairs or weather changes.
5. Enter into spiritual preparation. I didn't realize how important this step was when I first started taking retreats; I never miss it now. As soon as you schedule it, commit your retreat

to God, and ask him to begin preparing you for what he has planned. It is a good idea to ask a few others to also be praying for your retreat, as getting away with Jesus invites spiritual opposition. Extra prayer support before, during, and after your retreat can be essential to your experience.

Now that some of your questions have been answered, let's talk about what kind of retreat might best fit your needs.

packing for a personal retreat

In addition to your usual packing list, these are some other items you may want to take on a personal retreat:

- ❖ Bible
 - ❖ Bible study materials
 - ❖ Notebook
 - ❖ Pen (or assorted colored pens)
 - ❖ Journal
 - ❖ Inspirational book
 - ❖ Music, headphones
 - ❖ Walking shoes/attire
 - ❖ Water bottle
 - ❖ Meals/snacks
 - ❖ Additional reading material for breaks/bedtime
 - ❖ Small items to personalize room such as photos
-

ONE STYLE FITS ALL

Not!

Are you on Facebook, girlfriend? I jumped on a few years ago, and oh my, can I get lost scrolling and scrolling through page after page of photos. These aren't just my photos; they're all the photos of all my "friends" as well, and sometimes even their friends. You get caught up too?

Have you noticed the variety of vacation photos among favorite posts? Families with young children flock to beaches. Traveling to renowned cities seems popular for couples in early seasons of marriage. Adventure shots of camping, hiking, and other strenuous activities pop up on my more intrepid friends' posts. Isn't it fun to travel vicariously to so many different vacation spots in a single afternoon?

Just as vacations come in many different styles, retreats do too, depending on our personality or season of life. What fits one season might not be as life-giving in another. What suits one friend's personality might not fit yours.

In this chapter, I'll offer you a "menu" to help you choose the best retreat option for wherever you are right now. Just like at a restaurant,

take a sip of water, settle in, and read all the possibilities before making your choice. Ready?

A Restorative Retreat: What If You Just Want to Take a Nap?

When my dear friend Gail was in the early years of raising children, she never seemed to get a mommy break. Her toddlers didn't nap, her parents both had health issues, and her husband worked long hours. After hearing repeated stories of my personal retreats, she asked wistfully if she could come along next time. (More on this in the next chapter.) I knew we would both stick to our own agendas, so I said, "Sure."

The day I picked her up, she strolled from the house with a very small bag slung over her shoulder. Surely, I thought, she'll need to go back in for another bag. But she glanced at my overstuffed suitcase on the back seat and climbed into the car, all ready to go. (Okay, so I have a hard time downsizing when it comes to packing.)

"Where is all your stuff?" I asked. "Your books, pencils, and notebooks?"

"Oh, I'm planning to take a bubble bath, a long nap, and maybe a walk," she answered, patting her little bag. "I have everything I need in here."

I must admit to feeling a little shocked as well as somewhat judgmental. Didn't she remember the stories of insights I got at my retreats from reading and writing? How could she call this a retreat if she was just going to rest?

My friend took her naps and her bubble baths, and I read and wrote. Funny, but we both came away feeling very satisfied with our time away. Different strokes for different folks.

Many years later, I finally understand the simplicity with which my friend approached our side-by-side retreat. *Rest* can be a primary retreat agenda. And rest looks different for different people. I

learned that from living with my husband, who finds raking leaves restful.

A retreat that offers time away to be with God as well as a time for deep rest is called a *restorative retreat*. This type of retreat focuses on nutrition, sleeping often, drinking lots of water, and simply experiencing the presence of the Lord without doing much else. But before you sign on the dotted line for this one, let me unfold it a bit more.

This restorative retreat is often chosen by moms in the season of rearing young children. I often called this season of my life the “blur years.” I remember little about it except that the intensity of parenting excluded almost every other aspect of life. (Oh, and I sure remember the week the kids all got chicken pox.) My verse of the day for *every* day pulled me through: “He gently leads those that have young” (Isa. 40:11).

It is hard to get away from young children for any length of time, because there is always one more thing to do. And besides, you’re too tired to even think about planning dinner much less a retreat.

Exhaustion, the major side effect of this season, often distorts our perception of ourselves as well as of God. Catching up on sleep at home isn’t likely to happen for a long time. Someone once told me you don’t get your energy back until your youngest child is four. For a mom of multiple children, a long wait might ensue. My youngest child turned four and the next one was born ten days later. Back to “go” to start the count all over again.

Okay, so maybe you’re not a young mom or a mom at all. Still exhausted? I thought so. Did you ever think the green pastures and quiet waters God uses to restore our souls (see Ps. 23:2–3) might look like your private room at a personal retreat? Or dining on a nutritious meal or two that you don’t have to plan, prepare, and clean up? Don’t you feel the restoration seeping in just thinking about it?

In case you are still wondering whether resting counts as a real retreat, look at the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:5–8. After one of the most triumphant, as well as trying, points in his ministry, Elijah is

full of self-doubt and doomsday thinking: *I have had enough, Lord*. He then collapses into a long nap until he is awakened by an angel, who offers him food and drink.

Elijah eats the catered bread, drinks the water, and falls back to sleep. Once again the angel wakes him with more food and water. Then “strengthened by that food,” he travels a long distance to do the next thing on God’s agenda.

Doesn’t it seem possible that God might want to offer you something similar for your weariness? The correct answer is yes. Perhaps you’re willing to admit the need for deeper rest, but maybe you’re struggling, as I did, with the bubble bath idea. Good thing Queen Esther didn’t question bubble baths or she might never have gotten around to becoming queen.

“Before a young woman’s turn [to audition for queen] . . . she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics” (Esther 2:12). God is so surprising sometimes.

Are you sufficiently enticed? If you’re hitting the wall—if you’re looking for the toothpicks to keep your eyes open—start with a restorative retreat. You’ll thank me later.

what other women have to say

“One long weekend I spent most of my time in the prayer chapel listening to worship music and letting it wash over me. It was a very good time. Sometimes I sleep a *lot* and then don’t have enough time to spend just soaking in God’s presence. Sometimes I try to learn or read or “take in,” and realize I don’t have the energy for that. I need to somehow balance my need for rest with my need for spiritual restoration and refilling.”—Julia

“I did get time to rest on my retreat—go to bed early, be still, just be. I was excited to feel like God was inviting me to be there, that he felt tenderness toward me, that he loved me and had good things for me.”—Darilyn

“On my first retreat I realized that I was ready for bed at 8:00 PM
Having the freedom to do that, guilt-free, was amazing.”—Julie

A Listening Retreat: Will God Speak?

Most of us would love to sit down with Jesus for an intimate conversation and get all our questions answered. Especially if we're assured we aren't in any kind of trouble, right?

Scripture is full of stories of God speaking to his people in such a way that they clearly knew it was his voice. Sometimes, as with the words of the prophets to Israel, the message was for a large group of people. At other times it was more intimate; think of the personal words God brought to Hagar, Samson's parents, Zechariah, Mary, and others. Words of endearment, instruction, comfort, or direction all flowed to God's loved ones as needed.

Most of us don't need convincing that God speaks to people. We just aren't sure he will speak to *us*. Guess what? He wants to speak to you, and he has a lot to say when you take time to listen. Getting away with God on a personal retreat can provide the time, place, and space to sit with Jesus and listen deeply. Don't expect a booming “Thus sayeth the Lord”; listen instead for a still, small voice whispering in your ear. Not that God couldn't speak out loud, but most of the time he speaks through the words of the Bible.

That might make you flinch a bit because there are parts of the Bible you haven't read or don't understand. True confession: I don't understand it all either. But there won't be any pop quizzes on the retreat. You can even just page through a portion of the Bible and see what shows up. God can be very creative in getting our attention.

Is there a book or chapter of the Bible you have been longing to dig into? A theme that keeps coming up for you, such as “don't be afraid” or “the peace of Christ”? Maybe you would like to know more about

gratefulness, hospitality, or the fruit of the Spirit? Sometimes I run into a concept I would love to research, and I make a note of it for my next retreat.

How about a character study on one of the Bible celebs such as Ruth, Daniel, or Mary? What notable trait keeps you remembering a particular individual? Courage? Faithfulness? Obedience? You may not have time this week to study such a person, but you would on a retreat.

If you would like to use some existing resources, an abundance of Bible studies are available on any of the above topics and many more. Stroll through your local Christian bookstore, or search Internet sources such as BibleGateway.com. And prepare to be overwhelmed by all the choices—I always am. Take your time, pay attention to key words or themes, and you will be able to narrow down your search and pick just the right tool for your season.

You can also transport yourself back to the day when none of these resources were available, only your Bible and a notebook. Really, it works. To be honest, that is still my favorite style of digging deeper into Scripture on a retreat. Cross-references are a nice bonus, but it is fun just to go sleuthing on your own.

But I don't do much digging in my day-to-day Bible reading. For many years I have used a daily reading plan created by The Navigators that takes me through the whole Bible in a year.² The beauty of the plan is covering Genesis to Revelation each year with four readings a day; the downside is that you need to move pretty fast to keep up. I make notes of points to explore more deeply, and I use my retreat times to revisit those sections. It's a great way to hone in on areas where I've heard God's voice all year long.

On my first retreat, I spent a great deal of time on the first chapter of Ephesians. I found each verse so loaded with application, it was delicious to savor for a while. Other chunks of Scripture that have been satisfying to me include the Isaiah 40s; John 14, 15, and 16; Colossians 3; Psalm 119; and many more.

Ready to try going old school with just your Bible and pen? There are two styles of getting into the Bible that you might find helpful. Don't be put off by the fancy names.

Inductive Bible Study

I learned about inductive Bible study back in college when I was part of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Without getting too technical, here are the three basic steps for examining a short portion of Scripture:

1. Observation: What does the verse or passage say?
2. Interpretation: What does it mean?
3. Application: How does the meaning apply to me?

Let's look at an example from Ephesians 1:18:

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.

What does the verse or passage say? When our hearts are able to perceive the plan God designed for us, we can grasp more of the hope he offers. God has something really good in mind, a "glorious inheritance" to share with us.

What does it mean? God wants us in on his plans; he isn't trying to hide them, and it is okay to pray for more clarity. In fact, each of us is called to hope for all he has prepared for us.

How does the meaning apply to me? Knowing more of God's plans sounds great, and I really like the idea that I am called to receive them. I am curious about the "glorious inheritance," but it sounds exciting and wonderful. I will start praying for more.

Lectio Divina

The second method goes by the name of *lectio divina*, which is Latin for “divine reading.” This method of reading the Bible has four parts, also with Latin names. I know—you might already be confused, so what’s with the Latin? Just hang with me.

1. *Lectio* (read). Read the verse/passage very slowly. Notice if any word seems significant. Try to stay in the stillness of the moment.
2. *Meditatio* (meditate). Read the entire text again, holding on to the words or phrases that seem to stand out. Ponder those words. By the way, this is not the same as the meditation that is part of some Eastern religions. You don’t empty your mind. Just the opposite: your goal is to fill it with the words of God.
3. *Oratio* (pray). Enter into a loving conversation with God about what you’ve read. Let him know your longings and concerns. Listen for how he might speak to you. You aren’t likely to hear an audible voice, but what thoughts run through your mind? What life issues does the verse speak to?
4. *Contemplatio* (contemplate). Sit in silence and let God’s love fill you. Enjoy the quiet, and don’t hurry on.

Listening to God can come in many other forms too, but these methods should get you started.

Now let me tell you about one more retreat style you might like.

what other women have to say

“One night on my retreat as I lay in bed, alone and quiet, I heard his voice very clearly about a new direction he wanted me to take. When I get discouraged I remember that moment—what I heard and what it felt like—and am encouraged to press on.”—Lora

“I loved the verses I meditated on from Isaiah 40 and Ephesians 1: ‘He [gently] leads those that have young.’ Wow. The season of life with small children is hard and God knows it and tenderly leads me. This helped me have more compassion for myself.”—Darilyn

“Years ago when I was trying to make a decision on whether it was time to leave a ministry I was working for, I went on a personal retreat to pray about the decision. God spoke to me through the verses Philippians 1:9–11. God enlightened me to the truth that it wasn’t about which decision was right or wrong, but which decision was best for me at the time. This really helped me to make the decision to leave the ministry with a sense of peace.”—Janice

A Goal-Setting Retreat: What’s the Plan?

Goal setting is my favorite thing to do while on a retreat. Maybe it is because I am a life coach, but I swoon at the sight of a calendar and manage to maintain at least three at a time.

Crazy, but one of the paradoxes of Scripture is that we are called both to plan and then to hand the plan over to God in case he has a different agenda. Hard for a girl like me.

My most recent retreat involved lots of planning. I couldn’t wait to get there with all my notebooks, calendars, and lists. Although I am a “paper” girl, I set up an electronic calendar for the first time and felt so professional. It was actually hard to sit still and pray first, committing the time and the next season to God. All I wanted to do was start filling in the blank calendar spaces.

New schedules entice me as do the fresh rhythms of each new day. Every time the calendar page turns to the next month, I want to take a turn with it to try something new. It’s like New Year’s Day every month. What is this month, this season, this year going to look like? Only God knows the answer, but taking some time away to ask him about it and create a rough draft is always a good exercise.

Some of us are goal setters, and I know some of you cringe at the

concept. Where do you fit on the planning spectrum between spontaneity and goal setting? Do you make to-do lists for each day/month/year? Do you love to cross off items as you accomplish them?

I keep an inexpensive, five-by-eight-inch notebook with tear-off pages for my to-dos; I review it every morning and then cross off items as the day goes on. Many good systems are available for us list makers.

Maybe you like a more generalized “sometime I would like to [fill in the blank]” without getting too specific about when. A life list would fit into this category. Years ago I spent my bonus hour in October creating my own life list: those things I wanted to learn or experience in the course of the rest of my life. I keep the list handy to pray over and, of course, check off. Do you have a list like that? You could after your next retreat.

Goals have been termed “dreams with deadlines.” Somehow that makes them seem friendlier, don’t you think? Although I have always been a planner, I didn’t really get into goal setting until I read Anne Ortlund’s *Disciplines of the Beautiful Woman*. I discovered this gem a long time ago, and it still has a prominent place on my bookshelf. The author invites the reader to create life goals: “Under the wonderful umbrella of ‘if God wills,’ we need to decide where we suspect he wants us to go.”³ Enticing question, isn’t it? I enjoy asking it at regular intervals.

Does this type of retreat interest you? If so, you’ve got lots of options! Check out the following goal-setting menu to see which style might be *your* style.

Life Goals

Life goals don’t change from year to year but define the overall direction of your life’s journey. It could be a list of four to six items of priority or a simple mission statement.

Here are mine from my first goal-setting retreat many years ago. As you can see, they are meant to last a lifetime. The older I grow in

the faith as well as in years, the more I realize that God's agenda is always in the direction of what he wants me to grow into more than what he wants me to do in a day.

1. Glorify God daily in my inward and outward life.
2. Love and support my husband so he can serve God to his fullest capacity.
3. See each of our children fully following Jesus.
4. Serve the body of Christ in love and flow in the gifts God has given me.
5. Be "salt and light" to the world around me.

Five-to-Ten-Year Goals

Can you project where you would like to be in five to ten years? What would it take to get there? Some of the five-to-ten-year goal categories might include family, career, ministry, and education. Ask God to give you some direction to fill in a few blanks.

One-Year Goals

One year from now, how do you want your life to look? Your family? Your work? Your body? Dream big but be realistic. From there, plan backward. What needs to be in place in six months? Three months? Next month? Next week?

Short-Term Goals

You can choose almost anything as a short-term goal. One of my faves is "Ten Goals in Ninety Days." It is a short-term commitment, yet it's long enough to make a difference. To do this exercise, think over different areas of your life and pinpoint what actions over the course of the next ninety days would bring satisfying, realistic results. Funny how the short-term goals add up to become long-term ones. See appendix A for more details and specific questions to think through.

Of course, if you make your plans, choose your goals, and then just leave them in your retreat file, they won't serve you well or likely even be accomplished. Would you feel comfortable sharing your list with your spouse, friend, or small group? How about praying over it on a regular basis? Ask God and yourself what kind of accountability would be the most effective to ensure success.

Restorative, listening, and planning are just three of the retreat styles available. Don't get too caught up in picking the "right one." Each one will deliver a good outcome, so choose based on your season of life and felt need, and pick another style the next time.

Now let's look at the specifics of what you do when you arrive at your retreat.

what other women have to say

"I also get a lot out of setting goals and priorities on retreats as they align themselves with what I am discovering in prayer time. I like to come away with plans and energy for reentering the daily routine. I don't want to feel like my spiritual time is ending; I want to continue on in a fresher way, even as the daily schedule comes back."—Debbie

"On retreats, I often read through my journals from the past six months to remember where I've been and then consider where I want to focus my time and energy in the coming months."—Emery

"One of the retreat exercises was to think about and write down what my 'perfect' day would look like. Doing this helped me realize that I am already closely living my dream, and that floods me with thankfulness. It also serves as a benchmark that I can turn to when life becomes too hectic or when I need to renew my sense of purpose."—Missy