



Introduction

The time in spiritual reflection this journal facilitates will change your life. It has done so for millions of others over the centuries. Psalm 23 offers the familiar promises about what God — the Good Shepherd — does for us:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

Many people today are in desperate need of this kind of "soul restoration." The busyness and stress of our lives wears on us. The work of service we do — whether in our churches, community organizations, or places of work — will deplete and damage us, unless we build habits of personal and spiritual renewal.

We can't give what we don't have.

If we are not taking time to remind ourselves of what is true and real, tending to the inner turmoil that arises as we go through our weeks, and reconnecting our hearts to the God we worship, who dwells around and within us, we will wear down and get cynical, anxious, confused, or resentful.

The work this journal encourages is not a luxury afforded only to people whose lives are simple and uncrowded: for monks, church staff, and "people who are really into spiritual things." **It is essential for everyone who wants to live a spiritually vital life.** It is for the householder, the

business leader, and the teacher, just as much as it is for the church worker. Maybe even more so.

The busier we are — the more chaotic and demanding our lives — the stronger our foundation needs to be. That's what this work is about: providing a source of inner calm and heightened spiritual perspective on the unfolding days of our lives.

You don't have to believe the promises here about how helpful this process will be, or the testimony of other spiritual practitioners and teachers. Try it for yourself. Do this work for 90 days. See what happens. You will be glad you did!

Instructions

For the next 90 days, plan to take 20 minutes out of your day to retreat from your activities and focus on your internal life and spiritual awareness. 15 minutes as soon as possible in the morning (before checking email, social media, or the news), and then five minutes in the evening, before bedtime. Spend more time than this if you'd like, less if you have to. But if you consistently spend less time than this, the benefits you receive will be significantly diminished. Some things take time.

This journal might seem prescriptive, like there's a very specific, regimented program to follow. Not so. Its purpose is suggestive: you are the one who needs to determine what it is you need during these daily retreat times. You might spend much, or little, of your retreat time reading. You might read just the Scripture chapter suggested for the day, or maybe something else, or maybe a different passage altogether.

You might spend much, or little, of this time in discursive prayer (forming your thoughts into specific sentences of praise, thanksgiving, confession, and specific requests). Maybe you will write some of these prayer items down, maybe not. You might also spend much, or little, of your retreat time in meditation or contemplation — allowing your mind to quiet, and when thoughts or worries come up, bringing your thoughts back to a special word from the Scripture, or a name of God.

How you spend this time is up to you, and is of secondary importance. *THAT* you spend this time is crucial. Taking time for personal retreat on a regular basis changes the rhythm of your life, and encourages your true self, your deeper self -- what the Apostle Paul calls the "new self" -- to be more prominent in your life. This journal is a space to record your thoughts and reflections during these morning and evening times. There is a place to write down questions, reflections, feelings, insights, and "to-do's." You can also write down the insights that seem to bubble up from the deepest part of your awareness (which mystics would suggest is the Holy Spirit within). More on that later. There is also a separate part of the page for your reflections at the end of the day.

MORNING – some general thoughts

1. **Take this time as soon as you can in the morning.** Don't turn on the news, read email, or check social media before your morning retreat time. Having retreat time first will allow you to take in the news, email, and social media from a different perspective.
2. **As much as is possible, have this time be in a special place set aside from noise and distractions.** Make it a place you enjoy being in. It should be comfortable and peaceful. Some ideas:
 - a separate room in the house devoted just for this purpose
 - a corner of the living or family room
 - on the deck or patio
 - in a certain chair (like a recliner)
 - in a closet
 - in your car (don't try to do this while you're driving)

Some people will have great challenges finding a place for this daily retreat time. Some people (e.g. families in high rise apartment buildings) may struggle to find a space where they can be alone. Some people (e.g. parents with large families and/or small children) may struggle to have a time and place where they won't be interrupted by their kids.

3. **Do the best you can, but don't use your busyness as an excuse.** Susanna Wesley, the mother of famed spiritual leaders John and Charles Wesley, was a busy mother with a house full of demanding children and an unsympathetic husband. As an adult, John wrote about his memory of her periodically covering her head and face with the exterior layer of her house-coat so that she could block out the kids and have some private time for prayer. If she could find a way to get some private personal retreat time, given her circumstances, so can you.
4. **You can use this time for either discursive or contemplative prayer (which is similar to meditation).** Just as people meditate by bringing their thoughts back to their breath when their minds start to wander, you can bring your thoughts back to a word or phrase in the Bible, a name of God, or some form of the Jesus prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me").
5. **As stated earlier, use this time in whatever way seems most helpful to you.** We suggest you **start by reading a Scripture passage.** This guide includes a suggested reading plan that encompasses many of the key Bible books in the New Testament ... reading a chapter a day. You might engage in reading of other Scriptures as well, and include reading other devotional literature -- that's up to you. But be sure to also include time for reflection, meditation, and prayer. This journal obviously encourages you to write at least something as part of this time. You might write extensively, or just jot down a few

notes ... maybe even draw a picture or two. You can also write down things that come to your mind that you need to remember, or things to do that day.

7. **The purpose of writing is two-fold:** First, to help focus and clarify your thinking (instead of letting your mind flitter around or spin in circles). Second, to keep a record of the questions, ideas, and insights that come to you during this time. (See next section.)
8. **You can either write your prayers out, or verbalize them ... but either way, be clear and definite. Don't just THINK THOUGHTS, articulate actual prayers.** For this reason, many spiritual teachers suggest that, even if you don't write out your prayers, at least vocalize or articulate them -- even just in your mind -- as complete sentences. Doing so creates a structure to these prayers, keeping them from descending into random, jumbled, disorganized spiritual cliches.

"What do I need to know today?"

You might find that during this time -- when you sit in silence and ask this question -- thoughts, ideas, or impressions might come up, either as reminders of things you already know, or new ideas. This raises an important issue that has been the source of varied opinions among people of faith for centuries. The question can be stated in multiple ways: *Is God speaking to you? Is prayer two-way? Is there a role for listening as well as for talking and thinking when we spend time in personal spiritual retreat?*

If the answer to these questions is yes, how might that be experienced? That is what these next 90 days are about.

The fundamental premise of the mystical stream of Christianity is that God is not just with us, but God is in us. If God is Spirit, and exists everywhere at once, then it's obvious that this would include a presence inside of us (in our minds / hearts / consciousness). That being true, the only question is whether we recognize and welcome this presence; whether or not we "open the door" of our awareness to this presence. The purpose of our personal retreat time is to quiet the chatter of the messages that are drummed into our heads from the external world, and tune into the presence and truth of God's Spirit within.

One way to do that is to simply ask: *"Spirit of God, what do I need to know today?"* Then don't wait to hear something from "out there," but rather pay attention to the thoughts and ideas that emerge from deep within. The Apostle Paul says in Galatians 2:20, *"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."* In that sense, the true self, the real me, is the part of me that is united with Christ. So I simply ask the question this way:

"TrueSelf -- Spirit of God -- what do I need to know today?"

Then start writing. Don't try to censor what you write, just get it down on paper. Sometimes words will flow, sometimes nothing will come. Either way, it's okay.

By the way -- and this is important to remember -- **don't automatically assume that what you've written are actual words from God, and that they should be trusted.** As the Bible

encourages us in 1 John 4:1, we should *"test the spirits, to see whether they are from God."* The words you write may be colored by your old self (the ego), and merely a reflection of pious-sounding words that are part of your religious conditioning.

But on the other hand, maybe there is something big, and something real happening here. Maybe you will find that what you have written has a stamp of peace, authority, and authenticity to it. The sense of "deep knowing" that people talk about could well be a sense of connection to the Spirit within, and by being attentive to this "deep knowing," as it emerges in your daily retreat time, you might over time come to a new experience of God's presence, love, and reality in your life.

Once again, you don't have to believe me or the testimony of other people who've had these experiences and written about them. Try it yourself.

And don't just try it once or twice. Try it day after day for a number of weeks. See what happens.

EVENING - Five minutes before you go to bed

Before you go to bed at night, take just a few minutes to reflect on the day. In the recovery world, this is referred to as taking a "daily inventory," where you think about good things that have happened while also acknowledging mistakes you've made, resolving to rectify them when you can the next day.

Ignatian spirituality (which dates back to 16th century spiritual teacher Ignatius of Loyola) encourages the practice of a "daily examen." The daily examen is practiced in a variety of ways, but it primarily involves reflecting on the day, and finding things to be grateful for, and taking anything you are concerned about and in prayer, turning it over to God's care.

The first -- and most important -- part of this is to write down several things you're grateful for from that day. What went well? Where did you see God at work? What blessings did you notice or experience, or were reminded of today? No need to wrack your brain, just write five things that come to mind.

The form of daily examen I was taught uses Jesus' teaching in John 10:10 as the basis of reflecting on each day. In this Bible passage, Jesus states, *"I have come that you might have life, and life to the full."* From this passage comes the principle that God brings life, and that turning away from God takes away life.

So if you want to take your daily examen further, you can look back on our day and ask two questions -- and write down your answers:

1. What brought me life today?
2. What took away life from me today?

The assumption behind these questions is that the things which brought me life are things of God, and the things which took life away from me generally represent ways that I've turned from

God, or things that are pulling me away from what God wants for me. Of course, sometimes it's not exactly clear how to interpret things ... Doing what is good and right is sometimes hard, and sometimes results in pain and hardship. Conversely, doing the wrong thing (or avoiding the good and difficult thing) can feel pleasurable, which we might mistake as "life-giving." But it's surprising, when you keep that qualifier in mind, how clear and obvious the day's experiences are.

Whether you use the recovery "Daily Inventory," the traditional examen, or the "what gave me life" examen, take a few minutes and evaluate the day. Write down any insights, reflections, or reminders for tomorrow. *Remember to turn over any worries or cares to God.* Then go to sleep in peace.

Materials You Can Use:

1. Prompts you can use for your own hand-written journal. Here are the prompts to guide your journal, both for the morning and evening time:

MORNING TIME:

- **Write:** Reflections, questions, insights from the reading. Include any updates, struggles, or challenges you're dealing with in life right now.
- **Pray:** Give thought to what specifically you want to pray for today, and either write it here, or offer complete sentence prayers to God in silence.
- **Optional:** After some time of quiet, write down what comes to mind in response to the question: "Spirit of God, dwelling in me, what do I need to know today?"

EVENING TIME:

- **Write:** Five things you're grateful for from the day.
- **Optional Daily Examen:** "What gave me life today; what took away life today?"
- **REMINDER:** Whatever problem, stressful situation, or need is on your mind tonight, be sure to turn it over to God's care ... trusting that God will be at work -- when and where you cannot be -- and you can leave things to God and sleep peacefully.

2. Access a printable page to make your own handwritten journal (obviously, this will mean printing 90 copies of the journal page for each day and putting them in a binder). This can be downloaded here:

<https://www.bethelprinceton.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/90-Day-Spiritual-Journey-Printable-Daily-Journal.pdf>

3. A list of Bible passages to read each day during the journey, and a checklist to use.

Schedule of Readings and Checklist

Q1 -- January - March

<https://www.bethelprinceton.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/90-Day-Spiritual-Journey-Reading-Schedule-Q1.pdf>

Q2 -- April - June

<https://www.bethelprinceton.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/90-Day-Spir-Adventure-Q2-Schedule.pdf>

Q3 -- July - September

<https://www.bethelprinceton.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Spiritual-Adventure-Schedule-Q3.pdf>

Q4 -- October - December

<https://www.bethelprinceton.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Spiritual-Adventure-Schedule-Q4.pdf>