



4-Hour Silence and Solitude Retreat

Introduction:

Thomas Merton once said, "There is no greater disaster in the spiritual life than to be immersed in unreality, for life is maintained and nourished in us by our vital relation with realities outside and above us." It is my belief that within silence and solitude, unreality is exposed, and reality comes into clearer view.

We all have things that we deny, suppress, or hide, and masks that we wear. Resting with God in silence and solitude allows us to take those masks off, place our shadow in front of us, and be completely open and vulnerable to God. It is in this vulnerability and openness where we are reintroduced to the identity of our true self before God.

Logistics:

Choose a 4-hour block of time where you can be fully present and attentive to God. It is important that it is a time when you are "at your best" and able to commit to the exercise without distraction or fatigue. Pick a place where distractions are limited and where you can completely turn your attention towards God. I would encourage you to leave your house, go outside, and reconnect with nature.

What to Bring: (Simplicity is the key)

- Bible (physical not digital)
- Journal
- Pen
- Snacks or pre-made meal
- Water bottle
- Weather appropriate clothes and supplies

What Not to Bring:

- Electronics (or have them switched off)
- Books besides the Bible
- Do not use the time for sermon or class prep
- Alcoholic products

Suggested Schedule (feel free to do what you want, but here is an example schedule to give you a starting place):

8am – 9am- Spend the first hour simply being quiet. Give yourself permission to sit in the awkwardness and unproductiveness of silence. Resist the need to pray a formal prayer but learn to simply sit in the presence of God.

One of the things I do during this time is to take a deep breath in and listen for God to say, "I love you" and then exhale the breath and tell God, "I love you too." I also pick a word that draws my attention to God like: "love," "beloved," "Christ," etc. and when I feel myself

getting distracted, I say that word until my attention is back on God. I also imagine myself sitting at the shore and pretend that the random thoughts that come into my mind are boats that are passing by. I recognize those boats, but I do not dwell on them. I let them pass by, and I turn my attention back to God.

9am – 10am- Go for a walk and spend time talking to God about the masks you wear and the things you try to hide, deny, or suppress. Be honest with God about what you think and feel about your mask or shadow. Listen for God's acceptance and love.

10am – 11am- Spend time reading the word. Try to read for transformation and not just information. Instead of simply reading the words, allow the words to wash over you. Don't be afraid to read a passage or chapter multiple times. As Dallas Willard has said, "It is better in one year to have ten good verses transferred into the substance of our lives than to have every word of the Bible flash before our eyes." Don't just ask "What is the text saying?" Ask instead "What is the text saying to me?"

11am – 12am- Write in your journal prayers, reflections, and insights about your time with God. Use the pen and paper to externalize your thoughts and be totally transparent with God and yourself. End with a few more minutes of silent meditation before leaving your retreat spot.

Conclusion:

Brennan Manning has said, "In the act of silence you're not waiting for God to make a move. You're becoming aware of the moves he is making." Silence and solitude are habits, disciplines, or practices that we enter to learn how to be ourselves again. It is only in these times of total awareness that we can be honest with ourselves about what we have become and who God has called us to be in Him.