

Personal Reflection Retreat



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PASTORAL HEALTH & FORMATION

DEAR VINEYARD LEADER,

Welcome to a half-day solitude retreat for personal reflection! You may have experienced a solitude retreat before and for some of you, this may be your first time. Whatever place you may find yourself in, it's encouraging that you want a moment of quiet reflection on your life as you end a year and start a new year. This intentional practice of reflection uses a muscle that sometimes isn't very developed because we spend most of our time tending to others and their needs. You may be a busy leader in a business or ministry, a college student with a full class load, or an exhausted parent of little children. No matter what your life stage or situation is, examining the good of what you have walked through in a year is so important. This retreat will allow you to go back and celebrate, thanking God for the precious gifts he gave you. The intentional space in this retreat might also give you time to reflect on the "undone" areas of your life, the places of grief, betrayal, or pain that you are walking through. It's critical to acknowledge the effect of these situations. My prayer would be that you may see the fingerprints of God in every situation that you carry.

This personal solitude retreat has three parts to it and is easily adapted to a small group if desired. I led this exact retreat in my church setting for 100 people! But please don't take the personal reflection out of it. It's the core of the retreat. The first part of the retreat is looking back at the year you are leaving. This will involve a reflection to quiet yourself and also some questions to think through. The second part is a short talk and that gives you a centering thought to meditate on as you have an opportunity to shift focus to the future.

The content for this retreat is from a talk that Tish Warren gave around her book, [Liturgy of the Ordinary](#). The idea behind this would be that you bring the gentle noticing from the past year/ season and bring it forward to give vision and focus for the months to come. This part must remain grounded and practical as so many of us set such high goals that we feel like failures at the end of the year because there was no way we would have accomplished the things we dreamed of. The third part is the most creative of all the parts! It is the opportunity to take the thoughts, words, and intentions and create something so you have a visible picture in front of you of the work you have done. There will be a couple of options for you to choose from and I encourage you to try something that you have never tried before!

So to prepare ahead of time, you will need to do a few things:

1. Put a date on the calendar for your solitude retreat. Plan on a three to five hour time period, depending on how quickly you work through the parts.
2. Find an appropriate space, free of distraction. You may even want to make this an overnight away to rest more fully and not rush yourself through the retreat.
3. Order Tish Warren's [Liturgy of the Ordinary](#) to possibly read a bit during Part Two of the retreat. There will be a recorded talk you can listen to but you may want to read a bit more.

4. Look ahead at some of the creative options for Part Three. You may need to gather some supplies beforehand to do the project.

5. And of course, make sure to have a journal and your Bible nearby as you will need these.

One last thought for you from doing many years of this retreat with hundreds of folks. Even though this is designed to be a retreat for just you, it is very beneficial to include folks in your journey at specific moments after you have done the hard work internally. Be aware that you may need a place where you receive healing prayer as you uncover places of grief or pain after part one. You may need to talk out loud some realizations you have come to and a spiritual director, pastor, or friend may provide the accountability you need after part two. It may be helpful and fun to have a friend or spouse do the creative project with you for part three. Think ahead for what would be helpful for you and plan accordingly.

May God richly meet you in this moment of a fresh year and bring clarity and wisdom to you as you slow down to reflect.

DANIELLE PATHAK

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PS. Reach out and let me know how this goes for you! I love hearing your stories!

OPENING LITANY FROM FRAN PRATT

(adapted to this retreat)

Sit quietly and start to be present to this time with Jesus. Take a few deep breaths. When ready, read out loud slowly:

Faithful God, I look back on the year behind me and appreciate Your presence with me through it. I look ahead at the year before me with hope and anticipate Your continuing love and the fulfillment of Your promises.

In this new year, grant that I may become
more faithful

more committed to Your kingdom work

more knowledgeable of Your ways

more familiar with Your Spirit

more pliant to Your instruction

more willing to give of ourselves to others

I pray for an increase

of love

of storehouses full of good things to share

of relational harmony and peace

of health

of meaningful work

of balance among work, play, and rest

of personal growth and wisdom

of grateful hearts

and most of all, of Your presence and power among us.

May I hear Your voice more clearly, and heed it.
May I be aware of the limits of our understanding, and work to expand them.
May the words of Christ dwell in me richly.
May I be vigilant for those around me who are in need and tend to them.
May I experience anew the rebirth and resurrection life of Jesus.
May I complete the tasks you set before me, love well those souls you give to
my care, and make good use of the time I am given on the earth.
I am grateful for Your love, kindness, and care.

AMEN



PART 1: LOOKING BACK

“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

Psalm 90:12

Sit quietly for a few minutes with a journal and think through each month from last year - January through December. Ask God to bring different situations to mind, major events/opportunities, and relationships that were difficult or fulfilling. Do your best to answer these rich questions. You may go back and adjust your thoughts many times as memories come to the surface.

If you get stuck and can't remember certain parts of your year, a brief look through pictures on your phone and your calendar will help jog your memory!



1. What were the most significant memories, events, conversations, and activities of the past year for you?

2. What would you like to celebrate from last year (unexpected blessings, good gifts, etc)?

3. In what areas or ways did you grow last year (emotionally spiritually, physically, relationally)?

4. What was challenging last year? What did you expect to do and didn't do from this past year? Where are your places of loss or grief?

5. What was the biggest time waster in your life this past year? What was the best use of your time?

6. What did you learn about yourself and also about God?

7. Is there anyone that you need to forgive or anything that you need to let go of? Describe.

TAKE A MOMENT TO
PRAY OVER THIS
REFLECTION AND THEN
TAKE A BREAK

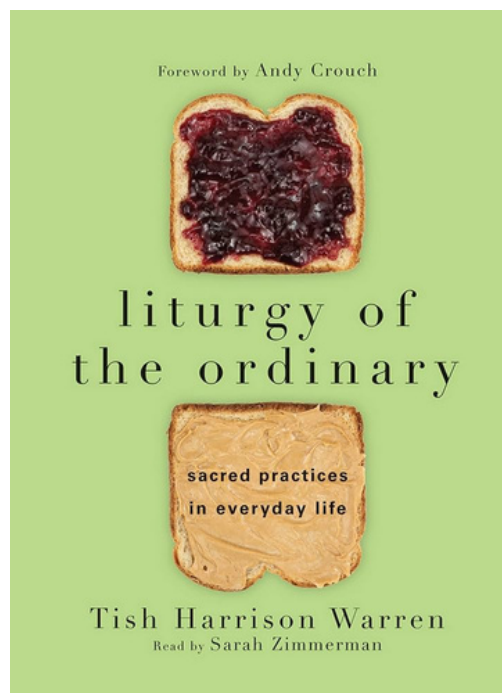


PART 2: LOOKING FORWARD

“In the overlooked moments and routines of our day, we can become aware of God's presence in surprising ways. How do we embrace the sacred in the ordinary and the ordinary in the sacred?”

Framed around one ordinary day, this book explores daily life through the lens of liturgy, small practices, and habits that form us. Each chapter looks at something—making the bed, brushing her teeth, losing her keys—that the author does every day. Drawing from the diversity of her life as a campus minister, Anglican priest, friend, wife, and mother, Tish Harrison Warren opens up a practical theology of the everyday. Each activity is related to a spiritual practice as well as an aspect of our Sunday worship.”

[Click to listen to a talk from the author and consider how it applies to your life.](#)



“If people can’t see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed.”

- Proverbs 29:18 MSG

Now let's start to look ahead at this new year...

Do your best to jot down a few phrases, sentences, and thoughts for each question. Don't censor yourself! Oftentimes when you sit with a question, different layers of the answer come up. You can always add to this at a later date.

1. What brings excitement/joy as you think personally about a new year?

2. What are the areas that you sense God is inviting you to lean into this year (finances, health, relationships, etc)? In what area(s) do you want to grow this year (emotionally, spiritually, physically, etc)? What could be some measurable small goals to work towards in these areas in the first 3 months?

3. When times get tough this year, what truth or value do I want to remember about myself and God?

4. Any new “small practices” that you want to create liturgies and rhythms with this new year?

5. What are you willing to struggle for this year to accomplish your goals?
(examples: pain or discomfort of a new work-out, new routine or habit, letting go of past hurt and pursuing healing)

6. What are life-giving ways to connect with God this year? Do you have intentional places in your schedule to pursue these?

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PART 3: CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Option 1: Vision Board Exercise (materials - card stock, pictures/words from magazines)

Cut out what speaks to you - not embracing what is speaking to you doesn't make it go away. Are there themes of the pictures jumping out at you? If it speaks to you- cut it out. Trusting your intuition as a gift from God. Continue to invite God into this process. Use your board for focus, but let yourself feel free with what you choose to put on there!



Option 2: “One Word” Exercise

(adapted from One Word exercise by Christine Valters Paintner)

“In ancient times, wise men and women fled out into the desert to find a place where they could be fully present to God and their inner struggles at work within them. The desert became a place to enter into the refiner's fire and be stripped down to one's holy essence. The desert was a threshold place where you emerged different than when you entered.

Many people followed these ammas and abbas, seeking their wisdom and guidance for a meaningful life. One tradition was to ask for a word – this word or phrase would be something on which to ponder for many days, weeks, months, and sometimes a whole lifetime. The word offered was something that would help to usher someone toward the next threshold of awareness in their lives, a journey deeper into the mysteries of being human.

This practice is connected to Lectio Divina, where we approach the sacred texts with the same request – “Give me a word”; we ask for something to nourish us, challenge us, a word we can wrestle with and grow into. We pause at the threshold before crossing into a new year and ask for a word of guidance for the season ahead.”

Pay attention to the answers to your questions in your reflection on last year and notice if there were specific words that surfaced. Notice what memories, feelings, and images stir within you. Where is God calling you to new awareness and action in your life? Choose one word that you sense God is stirring within you the most and sit with God and this word.



Thoughts to Consider...

- Think of this as co-creating with God.
- Remember that though a year seems long, it isn't. There is freedom in having a limited focus for a year - trust that if something doesn't make the board this year that it may show up next year.
- Trust the process.
- Use your board to simplify decision-making, use it as a screensaver, or your phone wallpaper.
- Share your board! We don't always know what it means when it goes on our board, but often others who know us may be able to point out what they see.

APPRECIATE, CHANGE, RELENTLESS, SELAH,
FOCUS, NO, BELIEVE, PAUSE, HEALTH, CHOOSE,
CURIOUS, SOAR, AWAKE, RELAX, ACTION,
SACRIFICE, TRUTH, DARE, DILIGENCE,
GENEROUS, LEARN, FREEDOM, COMMIT,
COURAGE, INVEST, AMBITION, LISTEN, TODAY,
RESOLVE, DIFFERENT, REVEL, CONFIDENCE,
CELEBRATE, CONNECT, ADAPT, PRESENT,
TOGETHER, BATTLE, OPEN, LIVE, DISCOVER,
FORTITUDE, POSSIBILITY, FINISH, REBUILDING,
STRENGTH, MORE, RISK, GROWTH, CREATE,
BREATHE, OPTIMISM, REFLECTION, TRUST,
THRIVE, INTEGRITY, BRAVE, MINIMIZE, RELEASE,
EMBRACE, PERSISTENCE, SLOW,
FAITH, BALANCE, SIMPLIFY, LOVE, BE, WRITE,
JOY, DIRECTION, IMAGINE, PUSH, ORGANIZE,
SILENCE, PERSPECTIVE, EMPOWER, TRANSITION,
GRACE, STEWARDSHIP, PROGRESS,
MINDFULNESS, MOMENTUM, UPLIFT, ADVENTURE,
FORWARD, DETERMINED, PURPOSE, PEACE,
IGNITE, NEW, TRANSFORMATION, ENJOY,
OPPORTUNITY, REDUCE, UNSTOPPABLE, SHINE,
AND MANY MORE!

Optional Exercises for Deepening Your Word of the Year

1. Create a vision board with your word and select images that will remind you of the meaning of your word.
2. Journal exercise: Imagine the Lord writing with you. Write I AM (insert your word) and this is what I want you to know. (example: I AM ALIVE and this is what I want you to know)
3. Write everything that you sense the Lord wants you to know about this word.
4. Look up the definition of your word in different online dictionaries to see what else you notice in different definitions.
5. Write 1-2 guiding principles that can help remind you and guard the work God is doing inside you. Display them in a way where you see them daily.
6. Pray and ask the Lord for a specific Scripture verse to guide your year or a song that will serve as a theme for your year.

