

# Retreat to Advance

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### (Reasons to Go on a Prayer Retreat)

By David Butts

It's easy to get caught up in the frenzy of activity as we push hard to advance the Kingdom of God on earth and manage our work lives, family lives, church responsibilities, etc.

If we use Jesus Christ as our example, as well we should, we see that His approach to advancing God's agenda was first – to retreat. Retreating, not in the sense of acceptance of defeat; but rather, withdrawing from normal activity for a period in order to prepare for intense activity. Jesus began His ministry by withdrawing into the wilderness for 40 days of prayer and fasting. He continued that practice throughout His years of ministry. One verse that continually challenges us is found in Mark 1:35: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place to pray."

Let me ask you a very serious question. If Jesus, the Lord of the Universe, needed to get away to a solitary place, away from distractions, to be able to pray, who are we to think that we don't need it, or that our busy schedules don't allow that "luxury"? It is precisely because we have busy schedules that we need that time of withdrawal.

Why retreat? Why not just a little extra prayer time at home? Is it necessary to go away to pray? Certainly we all pray in our homes, and that will remain the site of most of our praying. But Jesus saw the need to get out of the house (see

Mark 1:35) and away from potential distractions. When I want to move into a time of extended prayer, I almost always need to get away – away from technology, day to day responsibilities, and especially from the clutter that pulls me away from prayer.

For some, retreat may simply mean an extended walk where prayer becomes the main focus. For most, however, retreat means finding a place, usually near nature, where current cares and worries can be laid aside and serious prayer taken up. Whether for a day or a week, a carefully planned out retreat can revitalize your spiritual, emotional, and even physical well-being.

Some may think of a retreat as only for crisis situations; a potential change in work or ministry...overload or burnout...marital and family problems...and the list could go on. A retreat can be heaven-sent during those times of crisis and decision-making, but that's not its basic intent.

A prayer retreat ought to be a regular part of the Christian's spiritual walk. The reason is the amazing opportunities it provides for drawing near to God. Drawing near is not just a command for the believer. It needs to be the overwhelming desire of our hearts. Yet, though we may desire to be close to our heavenly Father and to walk in greater intimacy with Him, often the pressure of daily activities prevents us from spending the time necessary to quiet ourselves before the Lord. Going away from distractions and to a place of peace is often the needed element to restorer and refresh us in our Christian lives.

There are many possibilities when you look for a place to get away with the Lord for an extended time of fellowship with Him and for prayer. You could choose a place prepared just for that purpose. God seems to be leading many people to prepare places to minister to those who are ready to retreat and experience God's refreshing presence. Look around the area

where you live, and you may just discover one of these special places for retreat.

However, not everyone can just drop everything and head to a beautiful piece of paradise somewhere out in the middle of nowhere. There are other possibilities. Several times I have gone to state parks and looked for secluded areas to spend time alone with God. Even tucking yourself away in a quiet corner of a hotel lobby is a good option if you can't take a lot of time to travel somewhere. I have a friend who regularly goes to an abandoned farmhouse that he has received permission to stay at for his time alone. One day my wife and I went to the basement of a church to spend some extended time in prayer. It wasn't a place of natural beauty, but it was quiet and private. Weather often dictates your location.

## **How to Evaluate Your Need for a Prayer Retreat**

1. If you are feeling close to spiritual burn-out, you definitely need to spend some significant time seeking the Lord's plan and purpose.
2. If you are in the throes of a major decision, you will need time to seek God instead of trying to decide within the context of the busyness of your work or ministry.
3. If you are beginning to feel stress in your work, and feel your schedule getting away from you, it is probably time to withdraw for some time alone in prayer before the situation gets worse.
4. If you have a deep need/desire to draw closer to God and the cares of life continually get in the way.

Many people, especially those in ministry, wait until they are badly damaged or extremely frustrated before taking a retreat. It is our hope that you will consider putting time for prayer retreat into your schedule and honoring it on a regular basis.

This appointment should become more important than any other!

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