




**LIFETREE®**

# **YOUR GUIDE TO PERSONAL RETREATS**

**By Rick Lawrence**



# MY PERSONAL RETREATS



Over the years, personal retreats have become a major catalyst for a growing intimacy in my relationship with Jesus. During a particularly stressful time in my life, when my soul felt like a bare wire, I had a good friend who pointedly challenged me to take a “day away with the Lord” every month to recalibrate and reconnect. Because I felt a kind of raw desperation in my life at the time, I jumped on that idea. Since then, personal retreats have functioned like an extended “date night” for me, with a narrowed focus on simply enjoying the presence of Jesus. And I’ve extended this experience by taking at least one three-day personal retreat every year—usually at a Trappist monastery in the Colorado mountains, where I can reserve a stone “hermitage” that guarantees freedom from distractions. In the last 10 years, every one of the books I’ve authored have been written, at least in part, at that monastery—including *The Jesus-Centered Life*, my latest.

Because I’ve benefited so deeply from these one- and three-day retreat experiences, I’ve often recommended them to others. But I’ve found that many people love the idea of a personal retreat, but have no idea what to actually do on one. So, I’ve put together a couple of bullet lists that can help spark your own thinking as you consider either a one-day or more extended personal retreat...

-Rick

## ON MY ONE-DAY PERSONAL RETREAT DAYS, I BRING...

- Something to play music on—I bring a wide variety of music to choose from, including contemplative instrumental, old-school jazz, indie rock, and what I might call singer/songwriter Christian (Andrew Peterson, for example). I mix long stretches of silence with shorter stretches of music that matches whatever I crave in the moment.
- An eclectic collection of reading material—I usually bring a “serious” book about the Christian life by an author I already love, a new book by an author I don’t yet know, at least one devotional book, and a “comfort food” sort of book (I like books that are collections of favorite comic strips, including “Pearls Before Swine,” “Dilbert,” “Calvin & Hobbes,” and “Get Fuzzy”).
- A Bible—I’ll bring my Jesus-Centered Bible as a primary focus, but I’ll also bring a copy of Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* to change it up.

ONE-DAY PERSONAL RETREAT



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• Layered clothing—It's important to mix inside experiences with outside experiences, so I make sure I have the clothes and footwear I need to ramble outside. I always take a walk or a hike when I'm on a one-day retreat. I make sure to bring along a small pad of paper that can fit in my back pocket, and a pen—that's so I can write anything that Jesus says to me as I walk. Mostly, I pray out loud when I'm walking, talking to Him in a conversational way about anything that pops into my head. Because a personal retreat offers more time and space for prayer, I make sure to simply spit out all the things I'm anxious about, or have been chewing on inside.

• A determination to explore new experiences—At the retreat center I go to most often, there is an outside labyrinth experience (a kind of maze that's designed to focus you on prayer), a garden prayer walk, and little nooks and crannies scattered all over the grounds. Every time I go on a personal retreat, I try to experience something new.



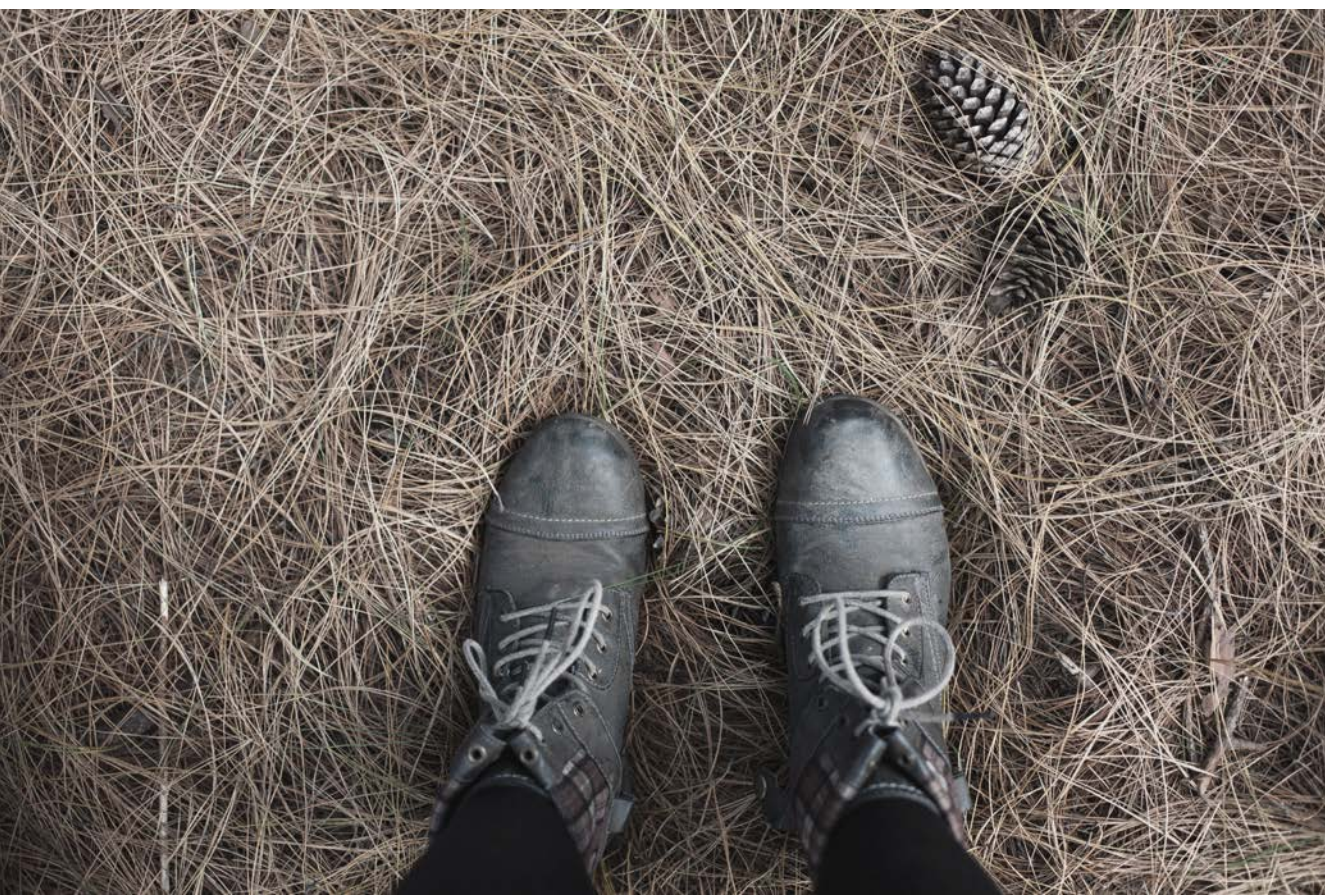
ONE-DAY PERSONAL RETREAT



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• A willingness to give my soul what it needs, at any particular segment of the day—I mean, I give myself permission to not perform for Jesus, as if I had to clear a bar to please Him. That means I often take a short nap if I feel like it, or stare out the window if I feel like it, or wander the grounds aimlessly if I feel like it, or write a poem to my wife if I feel like it... This is a day to draw near to the heart of Jesus, and to respect my weary soul.

• A willingness to embrace and pursue silence—Silence is a very intimidating thing to most people today—we're absolutely inundated with noise, and we don't know how to settle ourselves without it. So I make sure to pursue silence—this is why staring out the window is so necessary. I listen more than I talk to Jesus.



ONE-DAY PERSONAL RETREAT

# THREE-DAY PERSONAL RETREAT



IN ADDITION TO EVERYTHING I'VE LISTED THAT I BRING TO A ONE-DAY PERSONAL RETREAT, HERE'S WHAT I BRING FOR A MORE EXTENDED TIME WITH JESUS...

- Food—Though one-day retreats usually mean I bring a simple lunch with me, a more extended stay elevates the role of food. In the spirit of giving my soul what it needs, I choose my favorite healthy meals to bring—that means my favorite cereal (Kaashi Cinnamon Harvest), coffee blend (French Roast), lunch food (yogurt/granola/fruit mix, with a toasted tortilla and hummus), dinner faves (usually a small steak, fresh vegetable, and sweet potato), snacks (baby carrots, tortilla chips, granola bar), and dessert (Salazon dark chocolate). I drink sparkling water at every meal, as a change of pace. Also, I bring a bottle of red wine, and sometimes I lug my espresso machine with me so I can enjoy a latte.



# THREE-DAY PERSONAL RETREAT

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- Film—After a long day of simply pursuing Jesus, both inside and outside my retreat lodging, I like to lay on my bed and watch a good movie on my laptop before I go to sleep. I stay away from intense films or super-serious films and lean toward pure enjoyment (Jane Austen films and movies such as *The Way, Way Back*, *Dan In Real Life*, and the PBS series *Poirot* and *Sherlock*, for example).
- Hiking Gear—Because I take these extended retreats in the mountains, I make sure to bring hiking boots, hiking shorts, and layered coats that make it possible to hike in any weather.



# THREE-DAY PERSONAL RETREAT

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- Laptop for Writing—Because I'm a writer, and Jesus has called me into the life of an author, writing is a very enjoyable "spiritual discipline" for me, so I always bring my laptop so that I can enjoy stretches of writing on a project. It's a primary means Jesus uses in my life to develop intimacy with Him.
- Newspaper Sections—For meal times, I make sure to bring multiple copies of the "Living" section of my local newspaper, which includes human-interest features and the comics section. I read this during my meals as a break from my other reading, which tends to be more intense.
- Unforgettables—It's easy to forget bringing a flashlight or alarm clock or corkscrew or... stuff you end up needing but didn't foresee. I don't care about over-packing a little, because I want flexibility in what I do on the retreat.







There's nothing like  
Jesus-Centered Time.  
#Jesusinterruption



As you settle into your retreat with Jesus we want to give you a chance to slow down and pay attention to him. Our resources are designed around two central questions:

Who do you say Jesus is?  
Who does Jesus say I am?

