

Personal Retreat

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Preparation

I took my personal retreat beginning Feb 10th 5pm. While I would love to take credit for the preparation, I am convinced God has been working to prepare me over the preceding weeks. My original plan was to use the prior weekend, but a work emergency prevented me from beginning early enough, but I was blessed to spend a half-day trial run during the time scheduled. Ever since attending the Soul Care conference in the fall, I have been actively seeking to hear the Lord and have read through *River Dwellers*ⁱ, and am currently working through *Hearing God*ⁱⁱ. The assignment did not make mention of fasting or watching, but I incorporated both by fasting throughout the retreat, and slept as little as possible.

Heading into this meeting, the Lord brought me to recognition of a frustration with others' lack of response, my own lack of trust in fiery trials, and my own frustration due to lack of clear direction. Also in the week prior, I had to seek reconciliation with my wife after I had offended her with a careless decision. The Lord convicted me a day later to seek after Him just as rapidly when I am out of alignment. Before bringing these concerns before the Lord, I began with worship on the way to the church, and for at least 2 hours after arrival. Some of this was with the help of music playing, but other times I was singing and praying worship tunes and hymns from memory. It was the longest I ever remember spending alone in worship, but the time passed quickly. I then confessed a frustrating work discussion that occurred in the afternoon, before it turned into bitterness. After that, my heart turned to the frustration of the lack of response. I began praying for the Lord to wake more people up since 2012 when He delivered me and filled me, and sometimes it feels like there is little progress. I expressed this again, and relocated to the sanctuary since the building was completely empty at that point, and as I set my books down, right next to it on the pew was a typed testimony from a lady in the

congregation to whom the Lord has been giving dreams! The Lord reminded me of Him informing Elijah in 1 Kings 19 that he had a reserve of 7000, and immediately the frustration lifted. At this point I was able to confess lack of trust and move forward. My confidence in fiery trials had been built up already as the prior weekend was far different than previous emergencies. Throughout my school and work life, when encountering difficulty, I have learned wrongly to jam the feelings and force my way using adrenaline rather than trusting the Lord. The most recent work and home challenges were different. In these two crises, the Lord maintained in me a sense of peace and prayer, and there was no need to force myself to maintain composure, for the Spirit was empowering me from deep inside. Specific direction is still something the Lord has yet to provide, but I am no longer frustrated after this retreat.

Scripture meditation was the next thing I did, and during the prior weekend, I had a wonderful time with 2 Corinthians 4, where verse 6 description of God's light illuminating Jesus' face in our hearts really connected to me with 3:13,18. The deep recognition of Christ being in us, transforming us in a way that far exceeds that of Moses' face encouraged me, and continues to do so. Given this wonderful experience, I meditated with anticipation on Isaiah 40. It is virtually impossible for me to read this text, even in a more modern translation, without hearing Handel's beautiful music as accompaniment, which sometimes I find a bit distracting. Yet the overarching theme rang through, that we should be comforted because God's dealing with Israel is an example of who He *is*, and therefore how he deals with everyone, even *us*, even *me*. He renews our strength as we wait on Him, knowing that He is faithful, and is bringing the time of isolation to an end.

Meeting

During the previous week the Lord repeatedly gave me this. “Do you trust *Me*? Even if people show no or little response, do *you* trust me enough to do your part?” I received more from Him in phrases and dreams, but this was one of the most poignant. This has proved difficult for me to hear, and I have been learning to repeat it right back as a prayer: “Yes, I trust You, Jesus, and trust You enough to do my part.” The Lord also convicted me of being frustrated with the lack of ministry opportunities. It has been almost 3 years since we were kicked out of jail (where I was involved as often as 3 days a week for 7 or so years), and we are still waiting for the second facility to open, and the additional stringency have left us overworked and shorthanded. The Lord clearly told me not to worry and that ministry is whomever He puts in front of me. This has been such a relief, and His words have been inspiring me focus more on people as individuals. He has been teaching me this: “You must die to self... all self. All that matters is Christ, Christ in you. He brings life to your mortal body, where there is no life. The life that He brings is only explicable as Christ in You.” This was convicting, but even more encouraging, knowing that the frustration is only the negative way to look at it, because God wants us to overcome every challenge through His power.

Then, in the wee hours of the morning came a promise: “I will send My glory before you on [the local church]. Many are called by My name and will receive the fullness of the Spirit before year’s end. Be a faithful witness to them.” Had I not been on the ground, I probably would have fallen over. I have never received anything this specific before, let alone as encouraging. I have already had many encouraging meetings over the past week that lead me to see God working on this already.

I realize now that the little things, and the big things, are simply the same issue on different time scales. I am still learning how to trust God in the moment, when his deliverance is only moments to hours away. When I am in the Spirit, and actions meet up with truth, the deliverance is swift, and I get to see in miniature how God delivers in whole lives, and even centuries. When I sense a loss of peace, I can stop and offer a quick prayer of trust and dedication to Him, to bring me back in alignment. In a decade, or a lifetime, a lack of trust in the Lord exhibits itself in frustration and error as we fail to heed his call. When we get there, we should be convicted by the Lord's questions that Isaiah recounts "Why do you complain? Why do you say that your way is hidden or disregarded by God?" Instead, we are called to encourage ourselves that God is sure, and He provides abundant strength, energy, and even overcoming flight to ALL who hopefully wait and trust Him.

Benefits

It was difficult for me to believe the enthusiasm from Prof. Reimer when describing the importance and effectiveness of retreat from personal experience as well as in the lives of all who would hear. Although I was skeptical because I have never had anyone propose this, let alone attempted this before, I wholeheartedly affirm that God has used the past weekend to accomplish clarity and peace in me that I find difficulty to even describe. I believe it is something like this. My daily meeting with God is needed to maintain the peace for the day. When the peace is exhausted, the reserve tank is based on the deep understanding and abiding we have with Christ. That reserve tank is something that is filled up with deep interaction with God. If that isn't happening on a regular basis, the reserve tank becomes barren, and we eventually will find ourselves empty.

In addition to that, just as I have been learning to hear God daily, it has been helpful to hear Him on some more long term and deeper issues. We cannot focus on all levels simultaneously, and the day-to-day often has us so deep in the weeds, that it is difficult to process big-picture issues. The times in my life where God has met me in a most earth-shaking way have required Him to force a retreat of sorts by allowing calamity to drive me to Him for an extended period. Why should I force his hand when instead I can invite him to speak when I am listening without Him having to interrupt?

I was already inspired by mentions in other teachings, but this assignment thankfully forced me to schedule it sooner. My primary takeaway is that I need longer regular periods with God than can be accomplished in a day. I routinely push to expand time and depth most Saturdays, but I'm going to make a concerted effort to add these retreats to at least a bi-monthly schedule throughout the year.

- ⁱ Reimer, Rob. *River Dwellers* (Franklin, TN: Carpenter's Son Publishing, 2015)
- ⁱⁱ Willard, Dallas. *Hearing God*. (Westmont, IL: Intersity Press, 1984/2021)