

ABIDING
IN
CHRIST

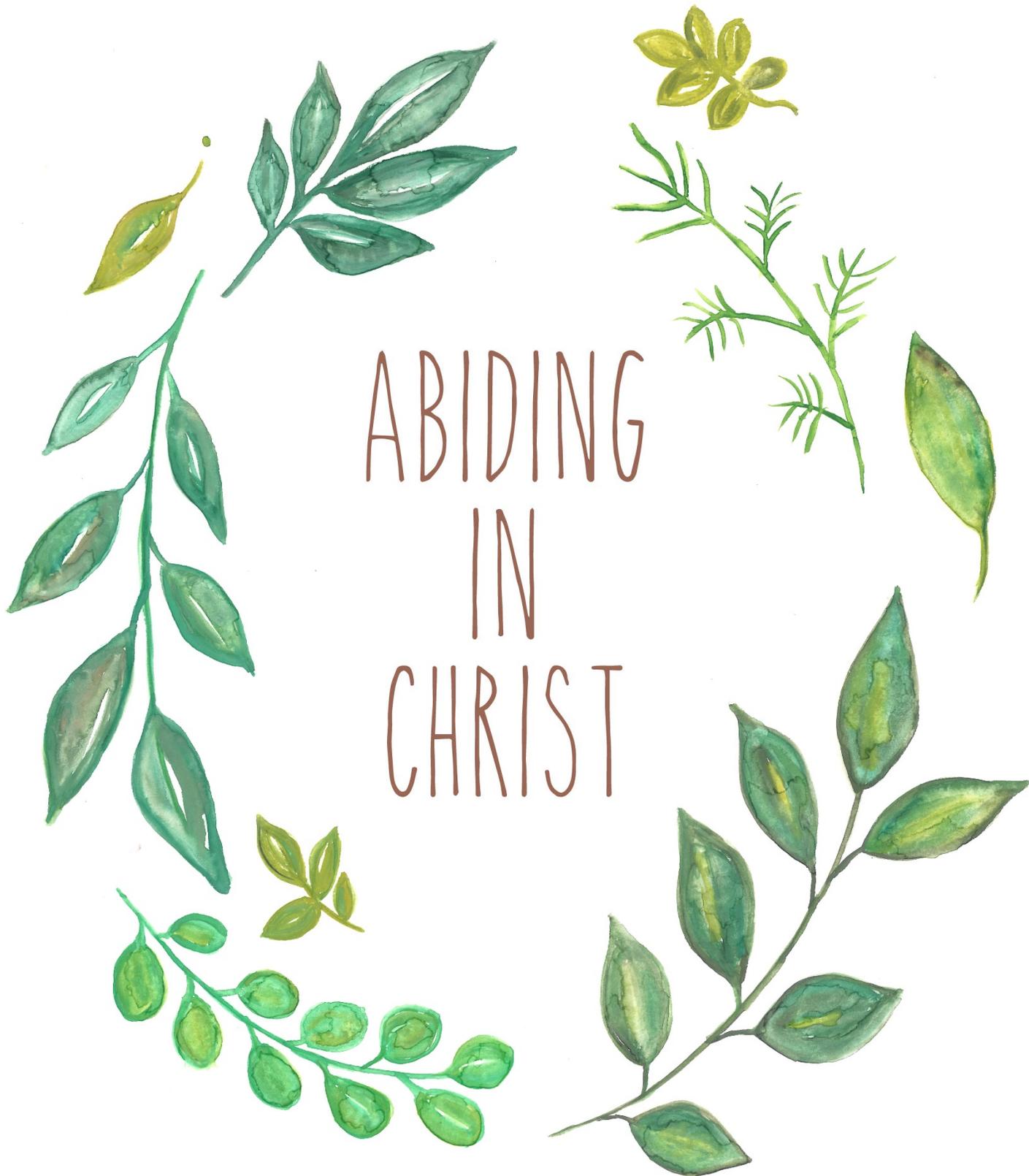


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“Welcome My Beloved One”



“Welcome my beloved one”...this is how our faithful Father greets us. We simply come before him and are welcomed. By setting this time aside to draw away with the Lord, you have opened yourself to his embrace and to growing in deeper communion with him.

The spiritual practice of withdrawing for a time of concentrated companionship with God has been modeled to us throughout the Bible. As we surrender ourselves and become fully present to God, he receives us completely.

Why the practice of silence? Psalm 46:10 answers, “Be still and know that I am God.” Silence fosters stillness, and in stillness you create the space to be present to God, to know him more fully and be awakened to his call. Dallas Willard in his book, *The Spirit of Discipline*, says “A proper abstinence [from speaking] actually breaks the hold of improper engagements so that the soul can be properly engaged in and by God.”¹

There is no right or wrong way to “do” a silent retreat. This is your time with and directed by the Lord. This booklet is simply an offering to help you to draw away from the daily distractions of life and be present with Jesus. The Holy Spirit is your guide and God’s Word the focal point for the practice.

This retreat presents John 15:1-8 as the “theme” passage and includes three “meditations” to consider. These meditations include verses from the theme passage as well as some corresponding questions and physical practices. These are NOT assignments that need to be completed or followed in order. Let the Lord direct your time. If you don’t follow any of the meditations, or you end up spending time in just one verse of the suggested passage (or another passage that is prompted), that is okay.

In his book, *Abide in Christ*, Andrew Murray writes, “May each one of us learn every day to say, ‘Truly my soul is silent unto God. May every feeling of the difficulty of attaining this only lead us simply to look and trust to Him whose presence makes even the storm to be calm. Cultivate the quietness as a means to the abiding in Christ; expect the ever deepening quietness and calm of heaven in the soul as the fruit of abiding in Him’.”² **This is our prayer for you today as you abide in Christ. Have a blessed retreat.**

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, p. 176

² Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ*, p. 83

Preparing Your Heart



As you physically step away from some of the distractions of your everyday life, you may find it challenging to be, “silent unto God.” Your mind and spirit may be far from silent and waiting. Here are a few suggestions to help you point your attention toward the Lord:

- ❖ Take a deep breath...or two or three and bring your awareness to the present moment. Check in with your body, breathing helps with that. Are you holding physical stress in your body? If so, don't fight it, but just be aware that it exists. Accept yourself as you are and in whatever state you come today.
- ❖ “Fast” from using your cell phone. Our cell phones symbolize connection to the world and may be a distraction to connecting with the Lord. Go “old school” and use a watch, printed Bible, pen and journal. You will be amazed at how turning your phone off quiets your mind.
- ❖ During your retreat time, if you find your mind is still racing and distracted by something you just “have” to do, take a moment to write it down and then return to a posture of being present with God. Whatever you write down will still be there for you after the retreat:-)
- ❖ Take a stroll. Sometimes moving your body, quiets your mind. Observe all that is around you. Sometimes God uses symbols and sights to teach and encourage you.
- ❖ Depending on where you are spending your retreat time, there may be external noise or distractions. Instead of trying to “force” quiet, simply accept where you are today. God may use a distraction, or what is causing the distraction as a “teachable” moment. For example, sometimes neighboring construction noise or a school yard can be a powerful analogy for a message God is trying to deliver.
- ❖ Part of the discipline of silence is to process emotions and thoughts with God versus talking to someone else about them. This can be a challenge for some of us who are “verbal processors” and may require a little extra patience.
- ❖ It is okay to rest and nap. Physical restoration may be part of the gift God has for you. Just be mindful that you don't use sleep as an escape.
- ❖ Open your time in prayer—that could be in the form of speaking to the Lord or just being quiet and presenting yourself to him. You may want to ask the Lord to bring to your mind any areas of distraction, concerns, fears, or “to-dos” that will keep you from being fully present to him. If it is helpful, you may choose to write these down on a piece of paper or note card and place them in an envelope. Seal the envelope as a recognition that the Lord is “Lord of all” and fully capable of holding and handling all the challenges and concerns of your daily life.



Begin Your Retreat

Abiding in Christ

It is a divine privilege to be unified with Christ. We are partakers of the Divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and have God dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit. This is an eternal gift beyond measure.

So how are we to live in light of this gift? How are we to abide? In John 15, Jesus paints a wonderful picture of a “fruitful” union using a metaphor of a grape vine. In the Old Testament, grapes symbolized Israel’s fruitfulness in doing God’s work. Fruit becomes an expression of a spiritual life and vitality that comes from abiding in the TRUE vine of Christ and indwelling Holy Spirit.

God uniquely designed you to bear fruit for his garden—drink in this time to reflect on this amazing privilege.

To begin, you may want to sit for a few minutes with your eyes closed or with a soft gaze. Take some deep inhales and slow exhales. This can help settle your mind and body in order to be present to the Lord. Take as much time as you need for this.

When you feel ready, you may want to open with a short prayer of dedication for this time you have set aside with the Lord. Then spend time slowly reading John 15:1-8. See the next page for the three versions of the passage. You can choose to read one version multiple times or each version once.

Experience the passage with your senses: see, hear and taste.

- SEE – Read the words, look for any that “pop out.”
- HEAR – Read the words out loud.
- TASTE – Consider how you respond to the passage. Is it sweet to you or maybe it “tastes” bitter or salty.

The Lord gave us our senses to fully experience him and in this case, his Word.

You may also choose to write down key words or phrases from the passage that the Lord illuminates. It could be a “theme” that he wants to emphasize during your time of silence. Or possibly, there may be something there that you need to confess. Or perhaps there is something new that opens the way to a deeper understanding of this familiar passage. Whatever comes up, just allow it in.

You may choose to spend the rest of your time in prayer, confession and reflection and/or participate in one or all of the following “meditations” based on John 15:1-8.



"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." John 15:1-8 NIV

"I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn't bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken.

⁴ "Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me.

⁵⁻⁸ "I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples." John 15:1-8 The Message

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." John 15:1-8 ESV

Meditation 1—The Gardener

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.” John 15:1

In John 15:1, Jesus acknowledges his relationship to his Father, *“I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener.”* This beautifully illustrates God’s role of authority, provision and grace.

It is interesting to note that Jesus did not jump straight to sharing his purpose as the vine or even to bearing fruit. Instead, he begins by reminding us of an important truth, that there is ONE he abides in, “my Father is the gardener.” This “Gardener” possesses all authority to create the garden, direct its growth and provide nourishment. All this is done through the Gardener’s loving and faithful tending of his garden.

Why does a gardener design and plant a garden? In this illustration, it would have been understood that a garden was planted for one reason: to bear fruit. Jesus used this metaphor to teach that the only way to bear kingdom fruit was through him. God so deeply loves and desires a relationship with us that he gave us Jesus, through which we have the privilege of oneness with the Father and the ability to bear fruit for kingdom glory.

In our John 15 passage, Jesus reminds us that while we possess this privilege of bearing fruit, God possesses the ultimate authority to “garden” his creation in order to fulfill his kingdom purposes. It is all God’s—the garden, the vine, the branches and the fruit! Isaiah 40:25-26 so beautifully expresses God’s ALL in ALL.

*“To whom will you compare me?
Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
Who created all these?
He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.”*



How do you respond to this Almighty Gardener? Spend time listening, praying, journaling. You may want to consider the following questions and practices:

1. Consider God the Almighty Gardener. Use words or images to illustrate the characteristics of God as your Gardener.
2. In your own words, describe God's ultimate purpose for his garden?
3. Physical practice: Take a moment to walk around a garden (or imagine walking through a garden). Look at the way it is designed and tended. Look at the plants and vines that you see. Also think about what you don't see—the roots, unopened buds, earthworms, etc. Consider how they are connected....each having a purpose in the design of the garden. What does this stir in you?



MEDITATION 2—The True Vine

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.” John 15:1-4

In John 14:6, Jesus states, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* He goes on in John 15, to illustrate this to his disciples through the garden imagery. He describes himself as, *“the true Vine.”* He doesn’t just say, “I am a vine,” but instead “I am the TRUE Vine.”

This was a time, not unlike today, when there were counterfeit or imposter “vines.” Christ clarifies to his disciples that he is indeed THE true Vine and the only way to a relationship with the Father. *“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins”* 1 John 4:9-10. Because of Christ’s obedience on the cross, we come clean before God.

What does abiding look like for us today? We have the life of Christ as a perfect model: complete obedience for his Father’s glory. We see him abiding in His Father throughout his earthly ministry and on to his death and resurrection.

As we make the choice to abide and follow Jesus’ command *“remain in me,”* we also receive his promise, *“I also remain in you.”* Through his gift of the Holy Spirit, we receive both nourishment and pruning in order to bear fruit for the Kingdom. God created us to be fruitful and Jesus reminds us that in order to be fruitful we will be pruned, *“He (God) cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”*

While pruning may feel uncomfortable, it clears the way for new growth. There is a lightness to being pruned. It removes the “heavy,” unproductive and fruitless branches, opening the way for nourishing and abundant fruit to grow.

There is also an intimate connection between the gardener and what he is pruning. The gardener has a great tenderness for the branches as he prunes them according to his design. His plan for their fruitfulness is specific... *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”* Jeremiah 29:11-13

Consider the model Christ set of abiding and how his complete obedience brings us the gift of eternal communion with the Father. This communion is a divine connection of love and fruitfulness. As you dwell on John 15:1-4, you may want to think about some of the following questions and practice:

1. Spend some time contemplating the “counterfeit” vines that you are faced with or falsely connected to. Bring those before the Lord in confession.

2. Imagine walking with Jesus, the TRUE Vine, through a vineyard and he says to you, *“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”* What is your response?

3. Think about a time when God cut fruitless branches or “pruned” fruit bearing branches (or he may be doing so now.) What was that experience like? How did it impact your connection to Jesus, “the Vine”? Can you identify any fruit that resulted?

4. Physical Practice: Create a cross from branches. Select a handful of branches. Consider the act of cutting and pruning; it is sharp and permanent...yet, has a specific purpose. Take half of the branches and prune to the size you would like for the horizontal part of the cross.

Then take the other half of the branches and prune to the size you would like for the vertical part of the cross. While pruning the branches you hold in your hand, think of how the Father holds you as he prunes you.

Take the two bunches of pruned branches and make them into the shape of a cross. Bind them in place with a piece of twine or yarn.

As you are binding the cross together, consider how you are bound to Christ through his sacrifice, allowing you to come before “the Gardner” clean and presentable.



MEDITATION 3—To Be My Disciples

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

John 15:5-8

In this passage, Jesus illustrates what it looks like to be his disciple. He is the vine and we are the branches. He says the branch must remain connected to the Vine and in doing so, fruit is produced that is *“to my Father’s glory.”*

Jesus also reminds us in this passage that, *“...Apart from me, you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”* This is a vivid illustration of a desolate life separated from the Vine.

As we continue to abide in the life-giving nourishment of the Vine, the Holy Spirit conforms our hearts to Christ-likeness with the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. His thoughts and ways become our thoughts and ways.

It is out of this very abundance that we yield the fruit of service, worship, and prayer that God has designed uniquely for each of us. This is truly the body of Christ at work—each disciple living connected to the Vine, through the Holy Spirit, producing fruit for the Father’s eternal glory.

As you consider your role as a disciple, you may want to spend time reflecting on the questions and participating in the physical practice.

1. Read Galatians 5:22-23. Talk with the Lord about the fruit of the Spirit. Is there one (or more) that he illuminates for you?
2. Spend time in praise celebrating the unique fruit of service, worship and prayer that the Lord has grown or is growing in you. John 4:34, *“My food,” says Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me to finish his work.”*
3. Consider what spiritual disciplines and practices keep you vibrantly connected to the Vine?
4. Physical Practice: You may want to take an item symbolizing fruit like an airplant, silk flower, fruit shaped beads or colored ribbon, and secure it to the cross. We are one with Christ because of the cross drawing all breath and life through his Spirit. It is from this place that we are equipped and blessed to bear holy fruit.



Notes



Planning a Retreat



For an individual retreat:

- Set a timeframe for your retreat—it could be hours, a full day or a weekend...or more!
- Choose a location that you enjoy and offers some sense of quiet—that could be your home, a friend's home, church setting, park or a retreat center.
- Set your cell phone and computer aside for the day. Use a printed Bible. It is helpful to let your loved ones and work associates know that you will be having a personal retreat, so that they don't contact you unless it is an emergency.
- Plan your menu in advance. Shop for and prepare your food the day before.
- Pray over your retreat the week before. There is occasional spiritual warfare before a planned retreat time!
- Order or buy retreat materials ahead of time. For suggested resources, see below.

For facilitating a group retreat:

- Select a location. If it is a home identify how much space inside and outside you have. It is generally helpful to plan on one or two people at the most occupying living space and one person in a bedroom. Because of the solitary nature of a retreat, people tend to not sit next to each other or occupy close personal space. Also, make sure to take weather (heat or cold) into consideration for outdoor space. If it is a park or public space it is helpful to contact the managing office regarding gardening schedules or other events occurring on the property.
- Pray about who to invite (or if it is within your church, speak with the appropriate person on how to put a notice in the church bulletin.) During the week before the retreat, commit each person to prayer.
- It is helpful to send an invitation with time and location details 2-4 months out.
- If you are charging for the retreat, specify who to pay and where to send payment (or the participants can bring payment to the retreat.)
- Select a menu. You can order meals from a local deli or restaurant, or choose a menu that is easy to prepare ahead of time. As the facilitator, you don't want to be distracted in the kitchen preparing food when you could be welcoming participants and launching their time of silence.
- Purchase retreat supplies. For list and suggested resources see below.
- Encourage participants to bring a journal, printed Bible and wear a watch, this will help prevent distractions from electronic devices such as a phone or tablet.
- Suggest participants wear comfortable clothes. If the retreat location includes outdoor space, participants may want to bring a beach chair, towel and/or hat.
- When you gather, take a few moments before entering into silence to welcome the participants. You may also want to have each person introduce themselves. It is also helpful at that time to offer logistical information about the venue and the time meals will be served. Then you won't have to interrupt silence during the retreat.
- At the conclusion of the retreat, you may want to gather the participants back for a short time of sharing. Often there are universal themes that emerge during this sharing that bless the entire group.

Abiding in Christ reflection and/or practice resources:

- Sheets of paper or cards with envelopes to write down any thoughts, confessions or distractions (this is referenced in “Preparing Your Heart”—page 2)
- Meditation 1: For the first reflection on “God the Almighty Gardener”
Suggested Materials: Blank drawing paper and colored pens, pencils or watercolors
- Meditation 2: For the physical practice to create a cross from branches or twigs
Suggested Materials:
 - ❖ Twigs/Branches—Can be gathered from a garden or purchased from a floral design or craft store like Michael’s or Hobby Lobby. There are also numerous online resources.
 - ❖ Yarn and/or twine
 - ❖ Pruning shears
- Meditation 3: For the physical practice of securing something symbolizing fruit to the branch cross made in Meditation 2
Suggested Materials:
 - ❖ “Air plant”—these are living plants that do not require dirt. They can be purchased at a local nursery or online “Aquatic Arts Air Plant (12 pack)” on Amazon.com has a good assortment.
 - ❖ If you do not want to use an air plant, other symbolic fruit options could be silk or dried flowers, colored or fruit shaped beads or multi-colored ribbon.
 - ❖ Thin wire or fishing line to secure the symbolic fruit to the cross.
 - ❖ Scissors



About NEWIM

The Network of Evangelical Women in Ministry is a non-profit, non-denominational organization that strengthens Christian women who minister to others through networking, equipping and encouraging them in their walk with God. NEWIM's Foundational Verse—Colossians 1:9-12

Retreats

All of NEWIM's contemplative retreats are for the explicit purpose of giving women time to be **with the Lord and deepening our love for him**. So instead of fellowship times, there are hours dedicated to silence and solitude so that we can contemplate the goodness of his character, ponder the mysteries of his love, and pursue those spiritual activities that draw us closer to him.

The Springs Retreat - The Springs Retreat is flexible as it is intended to be a private retreat with various options so that you can design your own retreat. When we spend time with the Lord, we come to know his love more deeply and find out that his love is all we really need. Register and join us in the fall and spring each year.

Silent Retreats - The Silent Retreats provide an opportunity for women to be strengthened in their walk with Jesus and grow in the knowledge of his will through the practice of silence. The one and two day retreats provide an opportunity for deeper communion with the Lord through an extended time of reflection, prayer and meditation.

Pastors' Wives Retreats - The pastors' wives weekend retreat is designed to give an intimate group of pastors' wives from all over the country the opportunity to come away for a weekend of rest, fellowship, renewal, worship, encouragement, beauty, wonder and the lavish love of Jesus. The weekend is hosted by NEWIM—there is no cost to the women. The retreat takes place at a private home in Newport Beach, CA. For upcoming retreats and information: <http://www.newim.org> | 408-218-8225 | Email: info@newim.org.

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