

Search Me O God—Psalm 139

Welcome and Settling In -- about 15-30 minutes

Take time to prepare the space, locate bathrooms, coffee and other essentials; welcome your retreat partner; set up emergency contact instructions and any other business. (You may want to post a "Silent retreat in progress; please do not disturb" sign). Pray for each other, together, before you enter into silence. Keep your conversation brief!

Come into the Lord's Presence – 10 minutes

Take 5-10 minutes in silence to consciously settle yourself with the Lord.

1. Leave behind the burdens, issues and distractions you brought with you. Picture yourself laying them at Jesus' feet, or giving them to Him to carry (I Peter 5:7). Resolve that when other distractions arise, you will turn those over to Jesus as well.

(Note: if, during the day, you remember something you need to do later, write it down and put it aside, so you won't be distracted by trying to remember it.)

2. Notice what is happening in your body: are you sleepy, tense, fidgety, sick? Offer your body to the Lord at this time as well.

3. What hopes or fears are you feeling as you anticipate the silence in God's presence? Bring those to the Lord as well, remembering that He loves and welcomes you as you are.

Greet the Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with this prayer, or choose your own greeting:

"O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever." (Book of Common Prayer, "Collect for Epiphany," p. 214)

Come into the Courts of the Lord with Praise – 20 - 30 minutes

Read or sing this familiar Christmas hymn, taking time to reflect on and pray the words, in worship of our Savior.

1. O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

2. For Christ is born of Mary; and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,

where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.

3. How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given!

So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.

No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,

where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.

4. Where children pure and happy pray to the blessed Child,

where misery cries out to thee, Son of the mother mild;

where charity stands watching and faith holds wide the door,

the dark night wakes, the glory breaks, and Christmas comes once more.

5. O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;

cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;

O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!

Take time to praise God in ways that are familiar – and then try one or two ways that are not so familiar or comfortable.

Meditate and Reflect on God's Word – Psalm 139

At this beginning of the Calendar Year, and midpoint of the Academic Year, it is a good time to take stock and reflect on where God has brought you, and where you are headed.

Spend some time in Psalm 139, following the *Lectio Divina* (divine reading, outlined below), and then with the meditations that follow. Take breaks in between, to rest, walk, journal, or waste time with God.

Read (*lectio*) the passage slowly, listening for God's voice to you in the text. Read again, and try to identify one word or phrase that stood out to you, that caught your attention.

Meditate (*meditatio*) or "chew on" the passage, looking at it from different angles, and using your mind, imagination, feelings, memories. As Mary did with the Angel's greeting, "ponder these things in your heart." You may write in your journal (or draw).

Pray (*oratio*) in response to the text. Talk back to God about what He has said to you. You may express thanks, or wonder, or doubt and questioning, or conviction or confession – whatever is on your heart to say to God.

Contemplate (*contemplatio*) or simply rest in God's presence, soaking in what you have heard and seen and felt. Don't try to do anything, but just savor the encounter with God and with the truth of His word. Quietly, when you are ready, ask God to show you how to live out what you have received.

Additional Resources for Spiritual Formation and Prayer can be found at:

Meditation #1

Your journal entries for the last year or semester may help you in this time of reflection.

The Spiritual Discipline of "Examen," often done at dinner or at bedtime, offers a way of noticing God's presence with us during the day past. It can also be used to reflect on a week, a month, a season, or a year. Take some time today to converse with the Lord about two questions (traditionally called "Consolation and Desolation") as you reflect over the past semester or the past year:

1. Where did I experience God's presence?
2. Where did I miss God's presence?

In *Sleeping with Bread* by Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn (Paulist Press) these questions are rephrased in several ways for the daily Examen, but you can adapt them for a yearly review:

For what moment today am I most grateful?

For what moment today am I least grateful?

Where did I give and receive the most love today?

Where did I give and receive the least love today?

When did I feel the most alive today?

When did I feel life draining out of me?

When did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, God and the universe?

When did I have the least sense of belonging?

When was I happiest today?

When was I saddest?

What was today's high point?

What was today's low point?

As you reflect on these questions, the purpose is not to wallow in guilt over where we failed, but to begin, knowing the love of Christ, and to walk with the Lord through the remembrance process, learning from Him what He wants to show you. Here are similar questions based on Psalm 139:

"You knit me together in my mother's womb. ... I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful."

What are some things about the way you have been created that are wonderful? Ask the Lord to help you make a list, and to celebrate together the wonder of your unique identity as God's beloved creation. How has God used you for his glory this year?

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Ask the Lord to search your heart with you, and show you anxious thoughts and offensive ways. Talk with Him about what He shows you, and walk with Him into repentance and newness of life.

Meditation #2

What is the Lord's invitation to you for the next semester or year? How are you being invited to love Him with your whole heart? With your whole soul? With your whole mind? With your whole strength?

Write out that invitation, and write out your "RSVP"!

Take time to dedicate yourself to the Lord this new year. Here is a prayer from the Celtic Daily Prayer book from the Northumbria Community, from "New Year: A Covenant service," p. 242:

Teach us Your ways, O Lord, and let us walk in Your truth.
We put behind us our stubborn independence, and turn again to You.

Now let us willingly fasten ourselves to the God of covenant:
That we be Christ's, and Christ be ours.

Christ has many tasks for us. Some are easy; others are difficult.
Some bring honour; others bring reproach.
Some are to our liking, and coincide with our own inclinations,
and are in our immediate best interest; some are just the opposite.
In some we may please Christ and please ourselves;
In others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves.
Yet the power to take on all of these is most definitely given us in Jesus;
for it is He who strengthens us, and comes to help us when we are weak.

Let us say yes to the covenant that He makes with us:

I am no longer my own, but Yours.
Use me as You choose;
Rank me alongside whoever You choose;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for You, or laid aside for You,
raised up for You, or brought down low for You;
let me be full, let me be empty;
let me have all things, let me have nothing;
with my whole heart I freely choose to yield all things
to Your ordering and approval.

So now, God of glory,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Your are mine, and I am Your own.

Closing

As you end your Rendezvous with God, take time to give thanks for your time with Him.

Also ask yourself, when will you plan another Rendezvous with God? What worked well, and what would you do differently?

In the last ten minutes, meet with your fellow retreatant(s) and share your experience as you feel comfortable. Take care to honor each other's quiet state and the privacy and intimacy of the day. Together, give thanks to God and pray for protection as you go back to the "real world". You can pray these traditional evening prayers together to close.

The Prayer of Simeon, and an antiphon:

Lord, you now have set your servant free

to go in peace as you have promised.

For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior,

who you have prepared for all the world to see:

A Light to enlighten the nations, and the glory of your people Israel.

Glory to the Father, and to the son, and to the Holy Spirit,

as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever.

Amen

Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping;

that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.

Amen