

Spend a Day with Jesus- Guide

Wouldn't it be great if we knew where Jesus lived, so we could go and spend a day with him? He'd welcome us warmly. This is what happened to two early followers of Jesus. Here's the way it went: *"The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means, Teacher), 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day."* (Jn. 1:35-39)

In John's Gospel we learn that Jesus chose to "live among us," and he delighted to spend time with people, loving them, listening to them with their needs and questions, and talking with them from his own life of "living with" his Father. Jesus today has no local "home address" among us, yet still we can spend a day with him, talking with him, listening to him and receiving anew his love. In fact, Jesus insists that we cultivate "living with him" day in and day out, "7/24/365." (Jn. 15:5) He's always "at home," and will welcome us. We know his address! His resurrection, ascension and gift of his Spirit make him always available to us, wherever we are. His home among us now is as close and accessible as is our own heart! His "home address" now is in the Father's house, and wonderfully, they also make their home with us! (Jn: 14:23). We can "spend a day with Jesus," much like those two disciples did long ago.

What is a retreat all about? It is about spending a day with Jesus. It is about bringing our needs and questions to him, along with our love and gratitude. We allow him to love us through serving us, listening to our questions and fears, spoken and unspoken, and speaking from his heart to ours. A good example of this is the time Jesus spent with his chosen Twelve just before his death, around a table. (See Jn. 13-17). It is about letting him do for us what he died and rose again to do: to show us his love, washing our feet, addressing our fears, reminding us of who he is and what he has for us to do and what he wants us to know, and letting him pray for us. We need his words, his presence and his Spirit's power. We need to be led anew into the heart of the Father and learn more of his love. (Jn. 1:18, 17:26) He loves us and wants to give us his peace and his joy;; he wants to be with us. He calls us "friends" and invites us to become his friends. (Jn. 15:14,15)

Why do we do it this way? The reason to set aside a day to come apart is to disconnect and distance ourselves from everything that would distract our attention from our loving Teacher and Lord. We seek solitude so that we can be more attentive to him; we keep silence so that we can listen better to him. We leave behind our place of work and daily life so that we can be with him only. In our "bodily" existence, we are very much dominated by where we are, what we are hearing, and whom we are with. To go apart for a day is to follow Jesus' own example of going off alone. He disconnected from the influence of other stimuli, to be alone with his Father. In reality, we do the same thing for any person we really value and want to connect with. It is a great act of love, to give ourselves undistractedly to another.

What do we look for? Since the one we seek is Jesus himself, who is present with us by his Spirit, in the final analysis, it is he who is "in charge" of the day. We bring our needs and our agenda, but what matters most is his agenda, his initiative. The most important part for us, then, is

to be open and listen to him. Our basic posture is that of “waiting on the Lord,” like Samuel who said, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” Perhaps the most vivid description of what we want to have happen in us is expressed in Psalm 131:2: *“But I have stilled and quieted my soul, like a little child in its mother’s arms, like a little child is my soul within me.”* (NIV/Jerusalem Bible)

Well, how do I go about it? In practice, however, most of us are not naturally inwardly and outwardly “stilled and quieted in our souls”! We’re pretty wound up and distracted with our own thoughts, injuries, anxieties, plans, tasks, fears and hopes. We also are very connected to the needs and wants of others, through physical presence, telephone, mail, papers on our desk, fax, e-mail, beeper, and perhaps more! We need to take deliberate steps with the intention of becoming stilled and quieted without and within. We set aside time, and then go apart, as first steps towards becoming more attentive to Jesus. We don’t take with us that which would distract our attention from our Lord (work, electronic gear, etc.). It is most helpful to go to a place that helps us disconnect and draws us towards God. Often a church or retreat center is a quiet place. It is also helpful to have some structure or focus to guide us during the day.

How will we spend the time? What will we do? Here are **two retreat models**. One model is the experience of doing a retreat essentially **“on your own.”** You take the initiative to set the day, choose the place and make decisions about what will be done during the time. Usually you do this alone, although a modified form is to go with another and each do the retreat “on their own,” perhaps meeting at the end to share and pray together. This model allows for a greater degree of silence and solitude, since there is no one else to interact with. It is more flexible, since place, time, and “agenda” depend on you and what will work for you. There is not the distraction that the presence of others can cause, nor the constraints of following a given structure. One is essentially alone with him or herself and God, with the freedom to be led and to respond without consideration of others or of a program structure. Solitude allows for issues to surface that we can ignore or avoid when always in the presence of others or distracted by entertainment or work. A retreat “on your own” with the Lord allows for the time and agenda to be “customized” for you and what you need at that time. There are many Biblical examples of this kind of retreat, of whom the foremost would be Jesus himself.

It is important to be aware of certain “dynamics” that accompany us as we go on a retreat. We need to get in touch with what’s going on in us, how we feel and what “shape” we’re in. Usually we bring a lot of **weariness** with us, and need to take it into account. We need to rest and allow our bodies to be restored so that we can be more attentive to the Lord. Part of respecting our weary bodies is to follow a rhythm that allows for engagement of mind and heart, and disengagement for change of pace, “incubation” and rest. A common mistake is to bring a “full” agenda to the retreat and try to “do” too much, ignoring our bodies’ needs, thinking that everything depends on our initiative and activity if we’re too “get” good results from the time. It is better to reduce our expectations and program, slow down, wait on the Lord and gently engage in some disciplines that help us “draw near” to the Lord who is always near to us. Many find that it is in the relaxed, “disengaged” moments that the Lord gives rich insights and ignites joy in our hearts.

Another common problem is our **restlessness**, which keeps us internally distracted and agitated and makes it difficult to settle down and become open to the Lord. Usually we first need some physical movement, liking walking, exploring, observing, to help us relax, or some journaling to get in touch with what’s running through our minds. Bodies stressed with weariness and restlessness need to be attended to before we can quiet our hearts before the Lord. Remember how much of Jesus’ teaching came as he and his disciples “walked” together!

The other model is the experience of doing the retreat together **with others in community** (not just together physically in the same place), under the leadership of “retreat leaders,” who will structure the time and content to a greater degree, planning for some time together as a group, with some input and orientation. Most of the time will be given to allowing for silence and solitude for each participant. Some of the “benefits” of this model are the following. The presence of a group committed to the same goals and being together in silence fills and “sanctifies” the space. There is a greater “intensity” of the presence of the Holy Spirit because of the presence of others who also are his dwelling place and who bring their own intentionality, focus and prayers into that place; hence often there is a greater awareness of the Spirit’s presence. For many the practice of silence in community feels “safer” and keeps them from some struggles or temptations that “pure” solitude might expose them to. To do the retreat together in community helps to “carry” each person forward as part of a group, rather than leaving all on the shoulders of the individual. For many it is easier to have others plan and lead the retreat, which allows for greater intentionality and accountability: you go with others, you are accountable to others, and you do not have to take all the initiative and responsibility on your shoulders. Going on a retreat with others will help greatly to translate your good intentions into actual practice! Moreover, the prayers of others for the event and during the time are aiding you in drawing near to God, as yours will aid them. Another benefit is the gifted leadership and availability of the retreat leaders, who are open to give personal input as requested. Finally, even though those on the retreat together do not communicate verbally, the shared experience of silence in community and of meeting God “in solitude” together can greatly enrich and strengthen the bonds of community.

For the retreat “on your own,” there is a suggested guide for spending a day with Jesus, focusing on him as our Savior, Teacher, Lord, Brother and Friend. (There is also a guide for how the day “in community” will be spent, where the retreat leaders will give guidance and orientation.) We are taking as a “day” from 9:00am to 4:30pm. An essential aspect to this discipline is to be **in solitude** (not in active contact with others, although others might be physically present with us, and to be **in silence** (refrain from speaking and get away from speaking and noise.) We offer some initial steps or ways to come before him and ourselves. We do not intend or want you to fill all the time with “following directions” or “going over the material.” Docility to the leadership of Jesus by his Spirit is more important than simply following a prescribed plan or going through all the material. If he takes over, follow him!

What can we expect to happen? He will be present to us and work in us, but how we will be affected or perceive his work can vary greatly. We do know that he loves to come to us in our reflections and meditations, in Scripture, in music, in our prayers, spoken and unspoken, in his creation and in symbols. Sometimes he initiates unexpectedly, as with the two walking to Emmaus; sometimes we initiate and he responds. Sometimes he comes and speaks powerfully and energetically, as at Pentecost; sometimes quietly, peacefully, inwardly, as with Elijah on Mount Sinai. Sometimes the day will be quiet and restful, without profound insights or experiences; other times it can be significant, full of insights and energy. Sometimes there is struggle and sighing, as depths are opened up and hard issues confront us. He knows our needs, and he knows what we can receive. He loves us and knows us by name. We are in his hands. As John could affirm, *“From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (Jn. 1:16-18).* He awaits us with his grace.

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