

Guided Retreat for the Better Stories Silence and Solitude Practice

As you get started, don't make a goal to answer every question in this guide. Pay attention to the questions that feel helpful in your connecting and hearing from God today.

Take a few minutes to settle in and to be present to the Lord. Breath prayer can be helpful. As you breathe, pray each phrase silently.

Try this prayer:

BREATHE IN: God, I am here with you [Pause and hold for a few seconds]

BREATHE OUT: Enrich my soul

Repeat that "in and out" prayer 5-10 times.

How are you feeling coming into the day? As you consider that larger question- think about it these areas:

How are you feeling physically?

How are you feeling mentally? Are there any big upcoming events or plans that are taking up a lot of space in your mind today?

How are you coming to the day emotionally? Are there any strong emotions that you think might ask for attention today?

How are you feeling about the Lord today? Where have you seen his presence in your life and work in the last few weeks?

Where have you felt he has been absent?

Is there anything you want from the Lord? Any question you would like an answer to? Spend a few minutes considering this and write down anything that comes to mind.

As we shift towards time in scripture give the answers to these questions to the Lord as an offering. Ask him to hold them while you spend time with him. If there is anything in these answers he would like to address to speak to give him permission, otherwise try and leave them with him throughout the day. Knowing you can pick them back up at the end of your time with him.

Look at Isaiah 55 and read it slowly 3 times. If you are able, read the passage out loud the third time you read through it. Make notes and underline words that seem to stand out.

Isaiah 55 (NIV)

1 “Come, all you who are thirsty,
 come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
 come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without cost.

2 Why spend money on what is not bread,
 and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
 and you will delight in the richest of fare.

3 Give ear and come to me;
 listen, that you may live.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
 my faithful love promised to David.

4 See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
 a ruler and commander of the peoples.

5 Surely you will summon nations you know not,
 and nations you do not know will come running to you,
because of the LORD your God,
 the Holy One of Israel,
 for he has endowed you with splendor.”

6 Seek the LORD while he may be found;
 call on him while he is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake their ways
 and the unrighteous their thoughts.

Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them,
 and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
 neither are your ways my ways,”
 declares the LORD.

9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
 so are my ways higher than your ways
 and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 As the rain and the snow
 come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
 without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
 so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
 It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
 and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
12 You will go out in joy
 and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills
 will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field
 will clap their hands.
13 Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper,
 and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.
This will be for the LORD's renown,
 for an everlasting sign,
 that will endure forever."

Write down words or phrases that stood out to you as you were reading the passage. Spend time offering those to the Lord. Do you have a sense what God might be saying to you through those words/phrases. Is there any response God is calling you to?

Come all- Invitation: Isaiah 55:1-3

Who is invited to come in these verses?

When you read the invitation in these verses what words come to mind? How would you describe the life God is inviting the reader to?

Consider in your life where you feel thirsty, hungry, and poor? Write down those areas.

What would it look like to have those areas satisfied? Be specific.

Allow your mind to become aware of God being present to your answers. Spend time listening to him, asking him to respond.

Is there anything you felt he responded to? Did he show you a way he intends to bring satisfaction or offer a challenge?

Seek the Lord- Salvation: Isaiah 55:4-6

Who is invited to seek the Lord in these verses?

What are they offered?

For the OT reader, nations would have meant Gentiles- those who were far from God and outside the covenant he had with his people. The wicked would have meant those who ignored God.

What does it say to you about God that he wants to offer those far from him with splendor and those who ignore him with mercy?

Are there places in your life that you feel distant from God? What would it look like for God to endow you with splendor as you come to him?

Consider places where you are ignoring God's ways or being unrighteous in your thought life- how do you feel when you think about God's first response to those places is mercy and pardon.

Both of these truths are true because of the work that Jesus did on the cross. Jesus is the 'him' that verse 4 is talking about. Spend a few minutes thanking Jesus for the work he did to allow God to bestow splendor and mercy on us.

The Word Going Forth-Enrichment: Isaiah 55:8-11

Where is a place in your life or in the world that clearly shows vs 8 & 9 are true?

Consider the image of snow and rain in these verses. Snow and Rain water the earth in a slow way. How does that help you consider the way God's word waters our life and make it fruitful?

What do you learn about God's word in these verses? Does anything surprise, encourage or challenge you?

How do these verses expand and build on what the Spirit's been teaching you through the parable this week? How might God's word be a great partner to you as you cultivate the 4th type of soil in your life?

Ask the Spirit to give you a vision of how he is using our last two stories (the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Sower) to water your soul and produce fruit that multiplies (seeds in these verses) and a harvest that is useful, like wheat for bread.

Go Out in Joy- Renown; Isaiah 55:12-13

Consider sketching the scene these verses paint. Even if you don't sketch it, spend time imagining it. What colors dominate your scene? What strikes you about this picture.

Consider some things in your life that are in opposition to the Lord's kingdom and the fruit he wants to bring through you into the world. Imagine them to be like immovable mountains. Ask God to show you these things bursting into a song-filled parade before the Lord. Ask him to show you what you need to do to partner with him in moving these mountains.

Think about places in your life where if you were to see them, they would be full of briars and thornbushes. If you sketched the scene label some of the thorns in your picture with these things. Ask the Lord to twist them and grow them into a fruitful Juniper and a flowering Myrtle.

Are there places in your past where you have seen God transform immovable obstacles or thorny moments into worship and life?

All of this is for the Lords Renown- his fame and reputation. How does his transformation of these things and more make him attractive and desirable?

Who might benefit from hearing some of the things you have discovered about the Lord today?

Great job spending time with God today. Times like this in silence and solitude, even extended time with him utilizing ear buds around lots of people is a great way to nourish the soil of your heart and make space for good seed to produce a harvest 100, 60 and 30 times!

As you close your time, look back at the arrival questions and see if the Lord wants to address any of those things before you finish your time.

Finish by giving the Lord the time you spend with him today as an offering of your love and desire for him.

I want to thank Alex Kirk, whose Greenhouse Retreats greatly informed this one. You can find a monthly guided retreat from Alex at <https://greenhouseretreats.substack.com/> if you would like to continue this practice regularly.