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## *The Discipline of Retreats*

Moving out of the demands of day to a place away ~ a quiet place

Here is the structure for a 24-hour retreat. It is intended to be shaped and adapted, as your situation requires.

### *Taking Time to Listen*

As we begin to make a space, make time, learn to listen for God, it is good to find a place away from all that calls us into the responsibilities, the busyness, of our everyday lives. I suggest a retreat of at least twenty-four hours. If you can stay two nights, it is even better. The second evening offers time for more reflection and the sharing of insights and thoughts that continue to bubble up. The second morning can be the time for worship with Holy Communion.

It is always good to know the reasons for gathering. Set some specifics. It will aid in selecting your resources.

Goals: Gaining new understanding about how we listen/hear God in words, music, silence, and actions. Discovering how God can speak to us through our bodies.

### Session I

#### Evening Gathering

Stories are a good way to begin. They allow us to connect our experiences with the words of the speaker.

Two friends were walking near Times Square in Manhattan. It was during the noon lunch hour and the streets were filled with people. Cars were honking their horns, taxicabs squealing around corners, and sirens were wailing. The sounds of the city were almost deafening. Suddenly one friend said,

“What an interesting place to hear a cricket.”

His friend said,

“What? You must be crazy. You couldn’t possibly hear a cricket in all of this noise!”

“No, I’m sure of it,” his friend said, “I heard a cricket.”

“That’s crazy,” said his friend.

The man, who thought he heard a cricket listened carefully for a moment, and then walked across the street to a big cement planter where some shrubs were growing. He looked into the bushes, beneath the branches and located a small cricket.

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His friend was utterly amazed.

“That’s incredible,” said his friend.

“You must have superhuman ears!”

“No,” said the man who heard the cricket.

“My ears are no different from yours. It all depends on what you’re listening for.”

“But that can’t be!” said the friend. “I could never hear a cricket in this noise.”

“Yes, it’s true,” came the reply. “It depends on what is really important to you. Here, let me show you.”

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a few coins, and discreetly dropped them on the sidewalk. And then, with the noise of the crowded street still blaring in their ears, every head within twenty feet turned and looked to see if the money that tinkled on the pavement was theirs.

Often we forget to really listen. Instead, before a sound has sunk into our souls we have given that sound a name. We are not listening deeply. The sounds have no connection with our hearts. There is no wordless wonder. To really pray we need to hear the tone, the inflection, and the need, beneath the words, the songs, and the sounds.

We have gathered here to take the time, to learn how and to practice listening – listening to God, our bodies, our families, our friends, our colleagues, and ourselves.

Spend some time with the image of listening and when has it happened or not happened during the past week. Then gather in small groups and share. Asking the questions: When was the best listening experience and what helped it to be good? When did listening go out the window and why?

Gather back as a large group and share as individuals are comfortable the highlights of the small group conversations. Read the text from Jeremiah, which is the text for the weekend.

“... This command I gave them. ‘Obey my voice...and you shall be my people... walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you.’”

Jeremiah 7:21-23

Noise Factors – what gets in the way of hearing – for us today – for those in the Bible?  
{Moses, the Israelites, Abraham and Sarah }

Break ~ Snack

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Worship      Guided Meditation

Pick a text that speaks to you about listening – the Jeremiah text [Jeremiah 7:21-23], Exodus 16:1-3, Exodus 19:4-5 or Deuteronomy 30:11-14, all texts that speak to listening to God

Close with song - such as “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” from *With One Voice*.

Whatever time is left can be for quiet conversation or time alone. Remember most retreats will have had a very full schedule – energy may be low.

Early Morning Prayer Time  
Music, scripture, silence and Lord’s Prayer  
Session II

*Taking time to listen to our bodies*

“Body” means the whole of human self; emotions, intelligence and will all residing in one physical place and inter-connected. God views us as a whole.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 is a possible text.

Spend some time talking about what our bodies can tell us.

Radical change begins deep within us when we welcome God’s healing and wholeness for all the needs our body tells us about.

Take a “Parable Walk.” Go outside or in the building for a walk observing one’s bodily responses to the exercise and surroundings. What stories can be told after our walk?

Praying the Lord’s Prayer ...how does our body help us pray? What positions are conducive to longer periods of intentional prayer?

Motion and Music = prayer  
How is this possible?

Free Time

Lunch

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### Session III

*Taking time to listen to the sounds and the silence around us.*

Who told you that there is only one way, one place, and one time to listen to/for God?

Practice some time of silence and sound with music, scripture readings such as Psalm 29, I Kings 19:9b-13 or poetry.

Small groups – how did our listening become focused?

### Session IV

#### *Wrap-Up*

What is it that God is inviting us to do?

Remember that methods are only starters or pump primers. Their sole purpose is to put us on the path of listening.

Discuss the value of journaling – writing down thoughts and impressions, prayers or questions that come after spending time in silence and in prayer or any other time.

Learning to listen to God, to be in prayer, to listen to those around us by intentionally focusing and practicing.

Scripture for practicing: Matthew 7:7-8

A prayer to use for self or at committee meetings, congregation council could be, ‘God, what do you want us to do and how should we do it?’

Spend some time in small groups, if possible, to share in a more intimate way this reflection of what has been important and what needs to happen next.

Close with a time of worship with Holy Communion. Invite as many as possible to be leaders for the worship time.

by Janet Jones