

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Youth Ministry Academy

*Created by Nazarene Youth International (NYI) and
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SESSION 15

Youth Ministry Discipleship:
Simplicity and Retreat

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Youth Ministry Discipleship: Simplicity and Retreat

SESSION OVERVIEW

Retreat or Advance?

Practices of Simplicity

Meditation and Contemplation

Be Still and Know

Bringing It Together

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- discover methods for Sabbath and renewal in your life.
- explore ways in which renovation and Sabbath can benefit your youth ministry.
- understand how to effectively lead youth in simplicity and retreat.
- put into practice these concepts by experiencing specific periods of simplicity and silence.

Youth Ministry Discipleship: Simplicity and Retreat

INTRODUCTION



This session is about creating space and time for reflection, silence, and contemplation. We will not only examine the spiritual practice of renewal, retreat, and renovation, we will actually put into practice these concepts and ideas by giving you time to actually try some of the exercises. We will also suggest ideas and activities designed to create stillness and listening in the lives of youth. Finally we will provide resources for planning and implementing a contemplative retreat for youth.

RETREAT OR ADVANCE?



NOTES

Youth ministers need to address a number of questions when planning retreats. Some of those questions are:

- What are you trying to accomplish? (curricular outcomes)
- Where will you go? (location)
- How will you get there? (transportation)
- How much will it cost? (budget and finance)
- Who will be a part of the retreat? (target group)
- What will you do? (to accomplish your curricular outcomes)
- How will you promote the retreat? (promotion/publicity)
- How will you tell the church about the retreat? (report to the congregation)
- How will you know if you accomplished what you set out to do? (evaluation)

Even with good planning, retreats can prove to be much more complicated and busy than we hoped they might be. Youth ministry is constantly on the go, even when on retreat. Richard Foster points out in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, our adversary, Satan, majors on three things in the midst of contemporary society: noise, hurry, and crowds. Our only hope to advance beyond the superficial aspects of our culture (secular and religious) is to learn how to recreate silence.

PRACTICES OF SIMPLICITY



NOTES

From over scheduling to late nights to lack of rest and more hurry and rush, many of our retreats end up looking more like advances. Plans for discipling fail due to distraction or exhaustion. Even when retreats do not appear busy, the constant pressure of the world often competes for our attention. This is especially true when we are trying to focus on God's presence and direction in our lives. So how do we overcome our busy lives and focus on God? This is the challenge many call the practice of simplicity.

How would you define the word simplicity? Possible responses might include:

- habit or rhythm breaking.
- respite.
- re-creation.
- changing routines.
- time-out.
- pause or breather.

One way to look at simplicity is to see the concept as the opposite of forming or developing habits or the breaking and reformation of existing habits. It is learning to simplify our lives from business.

In most churches if one asks rhetorically, "What would our lives and/or retreats look like if we intentionally planned and programmed for Sabbath, rest, and renewal?" I suspect they would still look like many retreats that often include a busy schedule, packed with programmed activities, and not much different for daily life for many people. Unless we consciously decide to live otherwise, we risk living aimlessly according to daily routines rather than deliberately choosing to live as part of God's kingdom. Practicing simplicity helps us reshape our patterns, remove that which clutters our attention, and listen more closely to God leading.

MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION



NOTES

There is a long tradition of meditative and contemplative worship within Christianity. The Bible and the Psalms in particular, are rich with illustrations and references to this tradition. Great examples surface as we read the Scriptures and include such passages as: Psalm 4:4; Psalm 27:4; Psalm 63:6; Psalm 77:12; Psalm 119:15; Psalm 119:27; Psalm 119:48; Psalm 119:78; Psalm 119:148; Psalm 143:5; and Psalm 145:5 to name just a few.

Historically the terms meditation and contemplation have been used interchangeably. In one sense both terms speak to the same goal, removing daily distractions so one can focus on God and rest and receive His holy love. As Marjorie Thompson writes, “Such communion with God is an end of itself, not a means to another end, however good. We do not enter the prayer of rest in order to become better servants of God; that is a natural side effect. The sole purpose of contemplation is to adore and enjoy God, which glorifies divine love.”

One way to understand the difference between these two approaches rests in the object of prayer. Meditation seeks to encounter God through Christian images, Scripture, music, even the beauty of God’s creation. The goal remains to use resources God provides to focus our attention away from other distractions and ultimately allow this image to provide a bridge to our encounter with God. The image may be created through words, reading specific Scripture, or singing a favorite hymn. It may be revealed in a symbol like the Cross or appear like an Easter sunrise to help us focus our attention as we become aware of the source of the image, God. Richard Foster calls this action sanctifying the imagination as we come to God with both mind and heart set apart for adoration.

If meditation describes an active or focusing, process, then the practice of contemplation, or contemplative prayer, reflects a more passive or receptive process that relies on relationship. One of the best human analogies occur when we are content to just be with someone we love, a husband with wife, or parent with child, resting in a relationship. Marjorie Thompson, in *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, notes that contemplation signals our move from communicating with God through word to communing with God through God’s loving presence. We find no words for these moments, just a deep sense of God’s love. We release any attempt to intentionally speak or even attentively listen out of our own effort. Instead we quiet ourselves before God and allow the Holy Spirit to work freely and reveal a renewed life and a deep sense of wholeness. In contemplative prayer we are not escaping our sense of personhood or stripping away our personal sense of self. Instead we are becoming fully aware of God’s presence, fully embraced in our relationship with God.

NOTES

Obviously both prayer practices work together, focusing to remove distractions and resting to receive God's presence and love. Not surprisingly they have been combined in one of the best known practices of praying Scripture known as *Lectio Divina* or divine reading used as both an individual and community practice. Often this approach begins with reading Scripture, moving to meditating over the text, using the Scripture to spark a prayer conversation with God, and then resting to receive God's presence. There are a number of excellent resources both in print and online that use the *Lectio Divina* as the centerpiece of both meditative and contemplative prayer.

Meditative and contemplative practices represent our attempts to practice simplicity. Practical exercises that create space for these practices include:

- Talk to God: Set aside time(s) each day for prayer (minimum 10 minutes).
- Listen to God: Spend time each day in silence (minimum 10 minutes).
- Read daily from the Bible as well as devotional classics.
- Observe a weekly Sabbath.
- Keep a prayer journal.
- Rewrite a psalm in your own words.
- Take a walk.
- Turn off your car audio while driving to work.
- Exercise without music, TV, or other distractions.
- Fast technology for 24 hours.
- Take an overnight personal retreat to a place with no TV or telephone.
- Practice *Lectio Divina* in your devotional time, for more information see contemplativeoutreach.org or Douglas S. Hardy's (2008) article "Lectio Divina: A Practice for Reconnecting to God's Word" in *Preacher's Magazine* (Lent/Easter 2009) available at preachersmagazine.org.

BE STILL AND KNOW



NOTES

For the next few minutes you are to engage in practices of meditation and contemplation. Be alone with God; engaged with God.

Practicing Meditation

If you need to find a quiet corner in a room, go. If you need to look out the window, do so. If you need to walk or read out loud, do it. Do whatever you need to do to be fully with God, having totally shut out the rest of the world. Select a favorite Scripture or perhaps one you read recently for devotions. Reflect for a few moments on the passage of scripture. As you reflect, make a list of words or phrases that come to mind as the passage is read. What did you hear? What words or phrases stand out? How is God described? What responses are asked for?

Practicing Contemplation

Put away all books, paper, and pens. Sit up straight, feet on the floor, arms resting in your laps. Beginning now and for the next 10 minutes, focus on silent listening. You may close your eyes or simply sit still until your time for silence is over.

You might begin with a simple process from the Scriptures and allow time for God to speak to you through the silence.

Be still, and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am . . .

Be still and know . . .

Be still . . .

Be . . .

What was it like? What did you think? What thoughts went through your mind? Did you hear anything? Was the silence uncomfortable for you? Ultimately the goal of simplicity is not to add another experience but to create space for God to speak in the midst of our busy lives.

BRINGING IT TOGETHER



NOTES

We began this session discussing typical retreat activities. The key question remains whether many of these activities distract us from God, deepen our attention upon God, or help us fully receive God's love and refreshment. When planning a retreat we often have specific planning questions that include location, resources, and the nature of the people attending. Obviously not all retreats accomplish the same purposes. However, if the goal is simplicity, if it is creating an opportunity to listen to God, then often this purpose will shape other planning questions. How would our retreat planning be different if we kept in mind the need for simplicity? How would our schedule be affected? Would some locations be more conducive to rest and renewal than others?

As noted at the beginning of the session, young people (and us) are tempted to spend most of our time being busy; even in our times with God. The goal of this session is that you will learn to engage in practices of simplicity, not as another task to accomplish but as an invitation to rest.

APPLICATION

**NOTES**

Although your first thoughts may be that you could never do this, I would like to encourage you to take an afternoon away from your work. Get away from the noise, hurry, and crowds. Take your Bible and if possible go to a fairly secluded place. Spend time reflecting on your relationship with God. Don't take any work with you. See the mini-retreat as an opportunity to simply spend time with God. Use this time to not only learn about your relationship with God, but also to learn about what it means to practice rest, retreat, and renewal.

EXAM



NOTES

1. Youth retreats tend to be quiet, relaxing, times away from busy living.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. Richard Foster points out in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, our adversary, Satan, majors on _____ in the midst of contemporary society.
 - A. noise
 - B. hurry
 - C. crowds
 - D. all of the above
3. Plans for discipling at retreats often fail because of _____.
 - A. over scheduling
 - B. distractions
 - C. exhaustion
 - D. all of the above
4. One way to look at simplicity is to see it as _____.
 - A. the opposite of forming or developing habits
 - B. the breaking and reformation of existing habits
 - C. learning to simplify our lives from business
 - D. all of the above
5. Most churches tend to over program retreats.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. Unless we consciously decide to live otherwise, we risk living aimlessly according to daily routines rather than deliberately choosing to live as part of God's kingdom.
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. There are no biblical illustrations or references of meditative and contemplative worship within Christianity.
 - A. True
 - B. False



8. Focusing on _____ can help us in our goal to meditate and seek an encounter with God.
 - A. Christian images
 - B. Scripture
 - C. music
 - D. the beauty of God's creation
 - E. all of the above

9. The practice of _____ signals our move from communicating with God through word to communing with God through God's loving presence.
 - A. contemplation
 - B. concentration
 - C. collaboration

10. Praying Scripture (*Lectio Divina* or divine reading) is mediating practice that can help us move into and rest in God's presence.
 - A. True
 - B. False

11. Contemplative prayer can help us become aware of God's presence, fully embraced in our relationship with God.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. What types of activities do we do each day that would be considered routine?
2. What is it about routine tasks that cause us to drift aimlessly?
3. What would it look like for you to reprogram your frequencies, reduce the clutter of your life and redirect your heart?
4. Consider the three phrases used in this session (reprogram, reduce clutter, redirect the heart). Describe how each might look if applied to your life?
5. How would our retreat planning be different if we kept in mind the need for simplicity? What things would be different? What things would be the same? How would our schedule be affected? Would type of location would be more conducive to rest and renewal?