

THEMBELIHLE THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

How to run retreats

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A Christian retreat is an intentional time away to experience a new awareness of the presence of God. It is an opportunity to get some distance and see things in perspective. It requires a pace that is unhurried and conducive to rest and relaxation in order to come back with a renewed sense of living as Disciples of Christ.

A retreat is a chance for an encounter with God, with other people, with creation, with issues, with self. A retreat is an intentional strategy to withdraw from everyday life. When we retreat, it is not for the purpose of just getting away and staying away. Everything involved in getting away, and all that is done while away, involves coming back with a renewed faith and sense of purpose in our spiritual life. "We go to the mountains not to see mountains, but to see the valleys with a new perspective." Hopefully we will deepen our relationship with God by intentionally reflecting and meditating. Whether you do this alone walking down by the river or by talking and celebrating with others, it is needed in order to come back with a renewed sense of love. Jesus modeled this pattern of celebration and reflection, and it is instructive for people today as well.

Retreats deepen the fellowship of a community through shared experiences and can focus the energy of a group, whether your purpose is to do planning, problem solving, team building, to tackle a topic of interest or concern or just to have fun. Retreats at Thembelihle Theological College are great, particularly for family and children ministries to allow fellowship outside of the church.

Remember, people attend what they help to plan. So, if you're looking to reach a larger or different audience than just the usual crowd, invite and involve others to assist in planning for the retreat as well. As you probably know, people that participate in the planning of an event are far more likely to take ownership and show up.

When can we go? The date is very important, and some churches come at a certain time every year, like the third weekend in a particular month. Make sure to check school calendars for concerts, weekend games, tests, etc., that would affect the attendance of your particular audience. Also at times when in-service days or other days off might allow for a possible new pattern - like a Saturday evening through Monday, for instance, or a Monday through Thursday. Let us share our many years of experience with you on planning church retreats.

For More tips on Planning Church Retreats these tips were taken from the College website: There are no rules for the right way to do a retreat, but there is one wrong way, and that is not to know your purpose. Decide up front what you want to accomplish, and then plan your retreat. There are many possibilities and combinations but let me offer three general types of retreats.

1. Play-and-pray retreat. This retreat offers both fun and extended times before the Lord. Though this may seem like a freewheeling setting without much structure (there is some free time), it is highly planned. Think through the games and the prayer times so they can accomplish your retreat goals.

Typically, these kinds of retreats are held to develop relationships and increase team spirit and morale. But a play-and-pray retreat is also great for spiritual breakthrough, fasting, and hearing God's voice. Play-and-pray retreats are usually 1 to 2 days in length.

2. Planning retreat.
3. Personal and professional growth retreat. This retreat is focused on staff training. The possible variations are limitless. You might bring in a speaker / coach / facilitator or lead it yourself. The most common topic is leadership, but spiritual formation is also a worthwhile investment. You might travel together to a conference but include significant discussion times with your team. The key is to make sure the content of the retreat has application to the lives of your staff members.

Determine who will attend the retreat.

Who gets to go often creates political skirmishes and hurt feelings, but don't let these things serve as guides for who attends. Make your selections intentionally. Who attends is determined by the purpose.

Determine your budget.

Again, there are no rules here, but don't be cheap. You are investing in the future of your church when you invest in your staff. If you don't have much money set aside this year, plan for a more generous amount next year. Funds for the retreat should be under the leadership development category in your budget.

Select a location and set the date.

Hotels work OK, but a retreat / conference center is better because it usually gives more of an out-of-town feel. If you choose a hotel, make sure it suits your purpose—such as a clergy couple getaway weekend—or has great outdoor recreational options such as a pool, spa, golf, walking

gardens, etc.

Avoid the major obstacles to a successful retreat.

1. Unclear purpose
2. Lack of preparation
3. Last-minute preparation
4. Unmotivated attendees
5. Poor location (no thorough on-site check before booking)
6. Staff missing (calendars not cleared in advance)
7. Lack of follow-through (You must follow up on idea implementation, assignments, and questions that arose during the retreat.)

I recommend two retreats a year, one of which is a planning retreat. Have fun.

Ready:

- Plan to arrive early at the retreat location in order to take time to quiet your heart and to pray over the site, the event and those who will be traveling to the Encounter.
- This is the opening session of the retreat. As people arrive, they should register and make themselves nametags.
There always seem to be people, however, that arrive late. As they arrive, simply have them join the session.

They can register during the break after the session.

- This session opens with worship. This is important to set the mood for the session and the entire retreat. We are here to encounter God and let Him work in our lives.
- If you are not using the PowerPoint® presentation for this talk, use an overhead projector, white board, or newsprint to show the different worldview diagrams that are crucial to this talk.

Aim — in this session, people will:

- Open themselves to God in worship.
- Learn the ground rules in order to get maximum benefit from the retreat.
- Know that they have an enemy who creates strongholds in their lives.
- Realize that they can overcome their enemy and his schemes through the blood of Christ and the Word of God.
- Understand what sin is.

Fire:

- As people arrive, display slide 1 as it welcomes them.
- If, for some reason you start late, do not rush this talk! It is alright to have a shorter break or to go later on the first evening.

- Take 25-30 minutes for opening worship.
- Figure 5-10 minutes for the announcement and icebreaker.
- Allow 50-60 minutes for the first teaching and discussion time.

Understanding Spiritual Warfare

Session One

Opening and “Understanding Spiritual Warfare”

Display this slide as people arrive before the session begins. Welcome!

It’s good to have you here. Relax.

Introduce yourself to someone.

Pray that this will be a fantastic retreat for each one here! Begin the session with worship.

Have attendees do the icebreaker standing up.

Ideally they should find others that they have not met before or persons they have not talked to in a long time. Give a simple overview of the objectives of the retreat. You do not need to take much time on this slide. It is included to focus our attention and to build anticipation for what is to come. If appropriate, you could share a brief testimony of how freedom ministry has changed your own life.

The guidelines are straightforward:

- “Please remain. . .” If possible, do not leave the grounds or depart early.
- “Minimize contact. . .” Please eliminate or minimize using cell phones, pagers, radios and televisions. We are on a retreat!
- “Respect confidences!” We will share deep things this weekend for the purpose of prayer and ministry. If we agree to honor one another’s confidences, we can share and minister more deeply. Make other needed announcements related to registration, ending time and the facilities.

Worship!

Icebreaker. . .

- Find two persons of the same gender near you.
- Share these things with each other:
 - Name (if you don’t know each other)
 - What was one of your favorite TV programs when you were a child?
 - What is one thing you want to receive or learn at this retreat?
- Say a very short prayer of blessing over one another and the retreat.

Our Goals for this Retreat

- Encounter God!
- Realize the Freedom and Presence of Christ in a Deep & Wonderful Way.
- Know how to Walk in Spiritual Victory.
- Be Equipped to Help Others Receive Their Victory in Christ. Announcements and Guidelines
- Please remain here for the entire retreat.
- Minimize contact with the outside world. We are on a Retreat! (Let God direct the outside world for the duration of this retreat.)
- Do not use a Television or Radio.
- Respect confidences.

This is simply the title slide to transition from the worship, icebreaker and announcement to the teaching portion of this session. Make sure participants have their manuals and are ready to make notes as God reveals to them areas in their lives that He wants them to experience freedom. As we live in the world, we can tell we are in the midst of warfare, but as Christians we are often confused about the nature of this war and who our enemies are.

To understand the war and how to win it, we must look to Scripture. Read this Scripture together aloud. It is a spiritual war. There are spiritual forces that want to destroy us. The enemy is not people (the liberals or the government or non-Christians). We do not fight against people but against “spiritual forces of evil.”

This war began in heaven and it has moved to earth. Heaven’s residents are relieved that the battle shifted from heaven to earth; now we are the ones with the problem! “Rejoice, you heavens. . . But woe to the earth!”

The Battle and The Victory

It’s a War Out There!

- Christians often do not realize it! Let’s look at 2 Scriptures.

It’s War Out There!

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

– *Ephesians 6:12*

It’s War Out There!

And there was war in heaven. . . . and. . .

The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.....

Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you!

– *Revelation 12:7-12*

NOTES

This conflict takes place throughout history.

Through our sin, the world has come under the influence and tyranny of evil.

How does Satan seek to penetrate our lives so that he can bring destruction and bondage?

The primary way that he does this is through strongholds. A stronghold is a heavily fortified place.

The word “stronghold” is used in both a positive and negative way in the Bible.

Let us look more closely at these verses.

Do not read the verses now as they are on the following slides. Do not dwell on this slide.

Read the Scriptures and point out that God is to be our stronghold.

It's War Out There!

- The conflict of Satan & God takes place between *Genesis 3:15- Revelation 20*.
- Because of Man's Sin, Humankind and the World is Subjected to Evil.

What is a Stronghold?

- The word is used both positively and Negatively in Scripture.
 - *Psalms 9:9*
 - *Psalms 18:2*
 - *2 Corinthians 10:3-5*
 - We will look at these verses closer now.

A Heavily Fortified Place

God is Our Stronghold!

The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. – *Psalms 9:9*

The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. – *Psalms 18:2*

NOTES

The Bible speaks of ungodly strongholds.

The word picture is from the Israelite conquest of Canaan.

Although they conquered the land, there were still fortified pockets that were under enemy control.

For example, the city of Jerusalem was not under Israelite control for over 200 years, not until King David conquered it. In the same way, even though you and I have surrendered our lives to Christ as Lord, there may still be areas that are “out of control.”

How are strongholds created in our lives?

Satan gains this ground through entry points.

Read these Scriptures.

In these passages, God says that anger and bitterness can become “footholds” or “roots” that allow Satan to create bigger problems.

Ungodly Strongholds

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. – *2 Corinthians 10:3-4*

Ungodly Strongholds

- The word picture in *2 Corinthians 10:3-4* is of the conquest of Canaan.
- The Israelites took the Land but not ALL of it was under their control.
- Certain Strongholds were under others control and remained holdouts for many years, even centuries.

What is a Stronghold?

- In the same way, though we have given our life to Christ, some areas may be “out of control.”
 - Ex: Anger, Lust, Fear, Resentment
- Satan gains ground in our lives through entry points. Our Enemies Look for Entry Points

“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. – *Ephesians 4:25-26*

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. – *Hebrews 12:15*