



PACEM in TERRIS

HERMITAGE RETREAT CENTER

A WOMEN'S RETREAT

She Is Clothed *with Strength*

A three-day retreat for women in any season of life — honoring the whole of a woman's interior world, her belovedness, her wounds, and her specific calling.



Sacred Paths Retreat Series

Before You Begin

Who this retreat is for · A word of welcome · What these three days will ask of you

This retreat is for women — single and married, young and old, mothers and not, professionally accomplished and quietly faithful, certain in faith and full of questions. It is for the woman who has been told too often what she should be, and who has too rarely been given permission to simply be known.

The Bible's portrait of women is richer, more varied, and more honest than we often allow ourselves to see. Today we look at the women of Scripture not as moral examples but as companions — women who were afraid and courageous, overlooked and chosen, grieving and joyful, uncertain and faithful. Women like you.

“She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs at the days to come.”

— Proverbs 31:25

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Two questions for your journal

- What word would you use to describe the interior state of your life as a woman right now — not the public version, but the honest one?
- What is one thing you carry that very few people know about — a longing, a wound, a question, a hope?

Day One: Beloved

Theme: Seen and known · Belovedness before role or function

The first and most fundamental truth about you has nothing to do with what you do, who you serve, or how well you manage the demands of your life. It is this: you are beloved. Today we receive that truth — not as a sentiment, but as the bedrock on which everything else is built.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

The woman at the well — fully seen

Read John 4:1–26 slowly. The Samaritan woman is not a hero in the conventional sense. She has a complicated history. She is alone at the well at noon — perhaps because the other women avoid her. And Jesus goes out of his way to find her, speak to her, and reveal himself to her first.

Notice: he does not begin with her failures. He begins with a request — 'Give me a drink' — and then he offers her something she did not know she was thirsty for. Sit with this encounter for twenty minutes. Jesus knows everything about you. What does he say to you at your well?

“Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am he.’”

— John 4:26

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

Psalms 139: Known before you were formed

Read Psalm 139:1–18. Every woman has been told, in some season of her life, that she is too much or not enough — too loud, too quiet, too ambitious, too soft, too emotional, too controlled. The psalmist knows none of this. He knows only that God's knowledge of you is total, his presence with you inescapable, and his thoughts about you more numerous than the sand.

Journal: Which voice have you believed most — God's, or the voices that told you who you were supposed to be? Write an honest account of both.

“I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.”

— Psalm 139:14

MIDDAY EXAMEN · 20 MIN

1. Gratitude: Name three specific gifts God has woven into who you are as a woman — not what you do with them, but the gifts themselves.
2. Where did you feel most drawn toward God in prayer this morning?

3. What voices — from your past or present — are hardest to set aside in order to hear God's voice?
4. What would it mean to live this week from the truth that you are beloved?
5. What one grace do you want to ask for this afternoon?

SECOND PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

Mary of Bethany: the woman who chose herself

Read Luke 10:38–42 and then John 12:1–8. Mary of Bethany appears twice in the Gospels. In Luke, she sits at Jesus's feet and refuses to be redirected to the kitchen. In John, she anoints Jesus with expensive perfume and is criticized for the extravagance. In both scenes, she is told she is doing the wrong thing. In both scenes, Jesus defends her.

Journal: Where in your life have you been told that what you are drawn to — spiritually, creatively, intellectually, personally — is the wrong thing, too much, or not your place? What does Jesus say about that?

Evening

Read the Magnificat — Luke 1:46–55 — as a woman's prayer. Mary sings it from within an impossible situation, before any of the promises have been fulfilled. She praises God for what he has done while it is still invisible. Sleep tonight as a woman who is allowed to be exactly who she is.

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.”

— Luke 1:46–48

Day Two: The Wound and the Calling

Theme: What has been hard · Bringing the interior life to God · The specific shape of your vocation

Every woman carries particular wounds — wounds that are often specific to the experience of being a woman: the ways her voice has been diminished, the expectations that have bent her away from herself, the griefs she has carried quietly, the losses that no one has adequately witnessed. Today we name them, and we bring them to the God who sees.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Hannah: the prayer that would not be silenced

Read 1 Samuel 1:1–20. Hannah weeps and prays in the temple with such intensity that Eli thinks she is drunk. She is not drunk. She is desperately honest before God — pouring out a grief she has carried for years. And God hears her. The child she had given up hoping for is given to her.

What is the grief you have carried so long that you have almost stopped praying about it? What would it look like to pray with Hannah's honesty today?

“She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly.”

— 1 Samuel 1:10

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The woman who touched the hem of his garment

Read Mark 5:24–34. She has been bleeding for twelve years. She has spent everything she had on physicians who could not help her. She is ritually unclean, socially invisible, quietly desperate. She fights through the crowd to touch the hem of Jesus's cloak — and she is healed.

Then Jesus stops. He does not let her slip away anonymously. He turns and asks who touched him. He makes her come forward, tell her story in front of everyone, and receive not only healing but a name: 'Daughter.'

Journal: What in your life has felt like twelve years of bleeding — chronic, costly, invisible, unresolved? Bring it into the crowd today. Touch the hem.

“And he said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’”

— Mark 5:34

SECOND PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

Deborah: the specific shape of your calling

Read Judges 4:1–10. Deborah is a prophet, a judge, a military commander, and a poet. She does not apologize for the breadth of her calling. She simply does what she was made to do, and Israel is freed.

Read also Romans 12:6–8 — the gifts that differ. Your calling is not generic. It has a specific shape that belongs only to you — a combination of gifts, wounds, experiences, and desires that no one else has in quite the same configuration.

Journal: What is the specific shape of your calling? Not what you should be — what you actually are, when you are most fully yourself?

Evening

Read Zephaniah 3:17 slowly. The Lord your God is in your midst — and he rejoices over you with singing. Not with approval for your performance. Not with relief that you finally got it right. With singing. Sleep as a woman who is sung over.

“He will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

— Zephaniah 3:17

Day Three: Sent in Her Own Name

Theme: Freedom from the performance · Going back differently

The resurrection appearances of Jesus have one remarkable pattern: he appears first to women. Mary Magdalene. The women at the tomb. He sends them as the first witnesses, the first proclaimers, the first sent. Today we receive our own commissioning — not in anyone else's name, not in a borrowed identity, but as the specific woman God made and is sending back into the world.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Mary Magdalene: called by name

Read John 20:1–18. Mary weeps at the empty tomb. She does not recognize Jesus when he stands behind her. She turns to him thinking he is the gardener — and then he says her name. Just her name. And she knows. This is the entire Gospel in one word: Jesus calling a woman by her specific, particular, irreplaceable name.

Sit in silence for twenty minutes. Hear Jesus say your name. What does that feel like? What do you want to say to him?

“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned and said to him in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’”

— John 20:16

THE SUSCIPE



*Lord, take and receive all that I am as a woman —
the strength I have built and the wounds I still carry,
the roles I inhabit and the self beneath them,
the love I have given and the love I have withheld,
the voice I have used and the one I have kept silent.
You made me. To you, Lord, I return what you made.
Do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace.
That is enough to go back into any room
as the woman I actually am.*

— After St. Ignatius of Loyola

FINAL EXAMEN · 30 MIN

6. Review all three days. What word or image gathers everything you have received?
7. Name three things God gave you that you will carry home.

8. What is one way you will live differently — more freely, more honestly, more like the woman God made — because of this retreat?
9. Write a blessing for yourself. Not what others have said about you — what God says about you. Write it in the second person, as if God is speaking it directly to you.

Go, beloved woman

You were not created to perform. You were created to be. These three days have been about recovering that self — the one beneath the roles and the expectations and the weariness — and discovering that she is, in fact, clothed with strength and dignity. Go and live from her.

“She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs at the days to come.”

— Proverbs 31:25

Core Practices & Extra Scripture

EXTRA SCRIPTURE

Women of Scripture and the God who sees them

- Genesis 16:13 — Hagar names God: 'You are the God who sees me'
- Exodus 1:17–21 — The midwives who feared God and defied Pharaoh
- Joshua 2 — Rahab and the scarlet cord
- Esther 4:14 — For such a time as this
- Luke 1:38 — Mary: 'Let it be to me according to your word'
- Luke 7:36–50 — The woman who anointed Jesus and was forgiven
- Luke 13:10–17 — The bent woman, set free on the Sabbath
- Acts 16:14 — Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened
- Romans 16:1–2 — Phoebe, a deacon and patron of the church

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