



PACEM in TERRIS

HERMITAGE RETREAT CENTER

A RETREAT FOR THOSE FACING SERIOUS ILLNESS

In the Shadow of the Almighty

A retreat for those living with a serious diagnosis, a chronic illness, or a life-altering medical reality —
and for those who love them. God is not absent from this. He is here.



Sacred Paths Retreat Series

Before You Begin

A word before anything else · How to use this guide · Permission to go slowly

This retreat makes one promise before it makes any other: you do not have to be spiritually composed to be here. You do not have to have resolved your anger at God, your fear of what is coming, or your grief over what has already been lost. You may bring all of it exactly as it is.

Ignatius of Loyola began his own interior journey during a long, painful convalescence after a cannonball shattered his leg. The Spiritual Exercises were forged in physical suffering. He knew that God is not absent from the hospital room, the chemo chair, the sleepless night of pain. He is most present there.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Permission to adapt

If you are well enough for three full days of prayer, use this guide as written. If you are not — if your energy is limited, if pain is present, if you need more rest — use only what you can. One prayer period per day is enough. Sleeping is enough. Lying in the hermitage and being held by God is enough.

This retreat belongs to you, not to a schedule.

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.”

— Psalm 91:1

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

One honest question

Write in your journal, without editing: What is the honest state of your heart right now — about your illness, about God, about the future? Do not write what you think you should feel. Write what is actually true. God already knows. Telling him honestly is where the retreat begins.

Day One: The Honest Prayer

Theme: Lament · Permission to be angry, afraid, and honest before God

The Bible's most surprising gift to the suffering is the psalms of lament — prayers that are raw, angry, sometimes accusing, and always honest. They are in Scripture because God wants us to know: this is permitted. Bring the whole truth. He can take it.

MORNING PRAYER · HOWEVER LONG

Begin with the body

Before reading anything, simply notice your body — where it is, what it is carrying today, what the illness feels like in this moment. Do not push past the body toward the spiritual too quickly. The body is where God meets us in illness. Breathe slowly. Let the hermitage hold you. Tell God what you are carrying today.

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · AS LONG AS YOU NEED

Psalm 22 and 88: The prayers that don't resolve

Read Psalm 22:1–19 and Psalm 88 slowly. Psalm 88 is unique in the Psalter: it ends in darkness, with no resolution. 'Darkness is my closest friend.' It is there because not every prayer has a tidy ending, and God knows it.

Journal: Write the prayer you have not yet prayed — the one that feels too angry, too afraid, or too honest. God has heard worse. He is not troubled by your truth.

"I am a man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath; he has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light."

— Lamentations 3:1–2

MIDDAY EXAMEN · 15 MIN

1. What is one thing I am grateful for today — however small, however physical?
2. Where did I feel God's presence — or his absence — this morning?
3. What fear am I most carrying right now? Can I name it specifically?
4. What one thing do I want to ask God for in the afternoon?

AFTERNOON PRAYER · AS LONG AS YOU HAVE ENERGY

Jesus in Gethsemane

Read Matthew 26:36–44. 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.' This is Jesus in the fullest solidarity with human suffering and human fear. He asks to be spared. He receives no rescue. He receives a presence: an angel comes to strengthen him.

You do not have to pretend you are not afraid. Jesus was afraid. You do not have to pretend you do not wish this were different. Jesus wished it were different. And God was with him in the asking. Journal: What is your 'let this cup pass'? Bring it, without apology.

“And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.’”

— Matthew 26:39

Evening

Read Psalm 23 slowly — not as a familiar text but as a map of the territory you are walking. 'The valley of the shadow of death' is not a metaphor for you. Receive each verse as a direct promise. Sleep tonight as one who is being shepherded, not abandoned.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

— Psalm 23:4

Day Two: Presence in the Darkness

Theme: God is here · Finding him in the suffering · The strange grace of limitation

The question illness always asks is: where is God in this? The biblical answer is not that God has allowed this for a lesson, or that suffering is a punishment, or that healing will certainly come if your faith is sufficient. The biblical answer is simpler and more radical: he is here. In the suffering. Not above it, not outside it — in it.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Isaiah 43: Called through the waters

Read Isaiah 43:1–5. 'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.' Not: I will remove the waters. Not: the waters will be shallow. I will be with you. Sit with the specific word 'when' — not 'if.' God is speaking to a people in exile, in suffering, in a situation they did not choose. He promises presence, not escape.

Journal: What does it mean to you, specifically, in your specific medical reality, to hear 'I will be with you'?

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.”

— Isaiah 43:1–2

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

Paul's thorn and the sufficiency of grace

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–10. Paul has a chronic, painful condition that does not heal despite prayer. God's response is not healing — it is: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' This is not resignation. It is a different kind of grace — the grace that works through the limitation rather than around it.

Journal: Where, in your experience of illness, have you already seen grace working through weakness rather than removing it?

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’”

— 2 Corinthians 12:9

AFTERNOON · REST AND RECEIVE

No agenda

This afternoon has no prayer assignment. Sleep if you need to. Walk if you can. Sit on the porch and watch whatever is in front of you. The contemplation to attain love begins with

simply noticing that God is laboring in all of creation — in the birds, in the light, in the sound of wind in the trees. You do not have to produce anything. You only have to receive.

Evening

Read Romans 8:18 and 8:38–39 — the nothing that can separate. Sleep tonight with this: whatever comes next, nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord. Not illness. Not fear. Not death. Nothing.

“Neither death nor life... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

— Romans 8:38–39

Day Three: Held and Free

Theme: Releasing outcomes · The hope that does not disappoint · Living fully in whatever time remains

There is a particular freedom that sometimes comes through serious illness — the freedom of no longer pretending that we control the future, no longer postponing the things that actually matter, no longer spending energy on what was never worth it. Today we receive that freedom, and we ask God what he wants to do with the life that remains.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

The resurrection of Lazarus — and what came before it

Read John 11:17–44 in full. Before the miracle: 'Jesus wept.' He wept before he raised Lazarus. He wept knowing what he was about to do. The weeping was not theater. It was genuine solidarity with human grief.

Sit with the weeping Jesus for twenty minutes. Before any hope of resurrection, he is simply present in the grief. What does it mean to you that the God who can raise the dead also wept?

“When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping... he was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled... Jesus wept.”

— John 11:33, 35

THE SUSCIPE



*Lord, take and receive what I cannot keep anyway —
my health, my plans, my control over the future,
the years I hoped for and the ones that may not come.*

You gave them. To you, Lord, I return them.

Do with what remains what you will.

I ask only this: be with me in what is coming.

Give me only your love and your grace.

They are enough for whatever lies ahead.

Even this. Even now. Even if.

— After St. Ignatius of Loyola

FINAL PRAYER PERIOD · HOWEVER LONG

Revelation 21: What waits at the end

Read Revelation 21:1–7. This is not escapism — it is the destination of the entire biblical story. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death shall be no more.' The God who wept at

the tomb of Lazarus has promised to wipe away every tear from every eye. That promise is for you.

Journal: Write a letter to the people who love you — to be given to them if and when the time comes. Tell them what you have found in these three days. Tell them what you want them to know about how God met you here.

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

— Revelation 21:4

Go, beloved sufferer

You carry a weight that most people around you cannot fully see. You have brought it here and set it before God. Take what you have received and carry it back into the days ahead — the fear, yes, still, but alongside it a companionship that was always there and that you have now encountered more directly. You are not alone in this. Not for one moment.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

— Psalm 23:4

Core Practices & Extra Scripture

PRACTICE

The breath prayer for hard days

When pain or fear rises: inhale slowly — 'You are with me.' Exhale — 'I am not alone.' Return to this whenever the ground shifts. It is not a magic formula. It is a practiced act of trust that, over time, changes what we notice.

EXTRA SCRIPTURE

For those who suffer

- Psalm 34:18 — The Lord is near to the brokenhearted
- Psalm 46:1 — God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble
- Isaiah 40:28–31 — He gives power to the faint
- Isaiah 53:3–4 — A man of sorrows, acquainted with grief
- Matthew 11:28 — Come to me, all who are weary
- 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 — Though outwardly wasting away, inwardly renewed
- James 5:14–15 — The prayer of faith
- Philippians 4:7 — The peace that surpasses all understanding

© 2026, Pacem in Terris Hermitage Retreat Center, 26399 Highway 47 NW, Isanti, MN 55040