

## **Desiring Growth... Retreating with John 15:1-8**

**Context of this retreat:** This retreat was integrated into a South Asian workshop on Scripture Engagement in November 2019 with around 30 participants (staff, students and graduates); it was the final morning of a 5-day workshop. One focus of the workshop was to look at how Scripture Engagement is relevant to our contemporary context using the example of how we think about 'success'. The decision to look at John 15 during the personal retreat was linked to this – since growth and bearing fruit is one of the ways in which the Bible redefines 'success'.

**What is a spiritual retreat about? How do we approach and enter into it?** At the beginning of the notes for the retreat (see next page), this is summarized with the following phrases:

- **spending unhurried time with God** – time to enter into his presence and be with him. The relationship is central to this time;
- **listening to God's Word and to our lives** – it is both: a time of looking honestly at our lives in God's presence and of listening to God in order to connect the two;
- **coming with open hands, holding out our lives to God and waiting to receive from him** – entering into a posture of waiting in order to receive whatever God has prepared for us. A prayerful posture is appropriate throughout the retreat;
- **enjoying the gift of silence** – silence is rare in our days; during a retreat it is given to us. But that takes the discipline of going offline from all communication and respecting each other's silence;
- **letting go of control** – we don't need to make anything happen during this time. It might not be a special spiritual experience; there might not be any tangible results. That's o.k. Time spent in God's presence is not about producing results, but it is always worthwhile.

### **Framework of the retreat in its original context:**

8:45-9:00 Worship

9:00-9:15 Introduction to the Retreat

9:15-12:00 Personal Retreat in Silence – everyone received the following notes. It was clearly stated that the notes with the suggested timings are there only to help guide through this time (and not an exercise to be completed). If one feels that God is speaking, it is good to stop and listen instead of trying to go through everything. Retreats are always about letting God do whatever he wants to do.

12:00-12:15 Some Reflections on John 15 shared in plenary

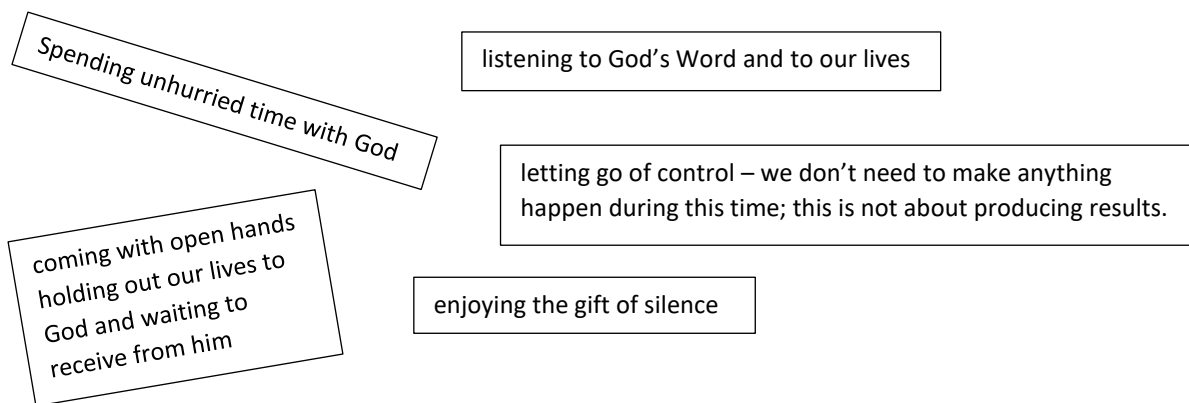
12:15-12:45 Opportunity to share in smaller groups about one's experience of the morning.

### **Using this resource:**

You can simply use the notes below for a personal retreat of 2-3 hours. Or you might want to integrate this retreat into a communal setting e.g. a conference, camp, training programme, staff week... Let your context decide how you integrate it and shape the framework. The above is not a model of how it should be, but one concrete example.

Sabine Kalthoff, IFES Secretary for Scripture Engagement

## Desiring Growth... Retreating with John 15:1-8



### 1. Taking time to settle down (10 min)

Find a place where you can sit comfortably, undisturbed. Focus on Jesus and his presence – he is here and you are here. That is enough.

The following prayer might help you open up for God:

*“My Lord and my God, take everything from me that distances me from you. My Lord and my God, give me everything that brings me closer to you. My Lord and my God, take me completely so that I belong to you fully.”* (This was said to be the daily prayer of Niklaus von der Flüe, a Swiss hermit of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.)

### 2. Listening to the Word (25 min)

#### Read John 15:1-8

\_Jesus is speaking to his disciples just before his arrest and crucifixion. He starts by saying to them (John 14:1): “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” In what ways is John 15:1-8 an invitation to trust?

#### Read John 15:1-8 again, slowly.

\_Draw the image that this passage describes – using the space on the next page. (If you don't know what a vine looks like, simply draw any fruit-bearing plant.)

Most of the time, not the individual, but the community is being addressed in this passage e.g. v. 4 “**Remain** (plural) *in me and I will remain in you* (plural).” Does this change anything to the image that you have in mind as you read this passage?

\_Prayerfully reflect on how this passage uses this image to talk about God the Father, Jesus, his disciples and how they all relate to one another.

\_Before moving on, make a few notes of what you have been hearing.

Space for your drawing of the image described in John 15

**3. Looking at Life – Take time to prayerfully look at your life since July/August through three windows (20 minutes)**

This is not about being complete. Even if you have just one thing in each window, that is fine. Ask God to show you what was meaningful for you – those can be small things.

What was troubling (challenges, crises) and how do you now look back on these troubles?

What good gifts (meaningful encounters, encouraging words, answers to prayer, reaping of fruit...) did you receive in your life and ministry?

What and who helped you to remain in Jesus during these past months?

**My experience of the past 3-4 months can expressed in this way:**

..... (give a name/title to your past months)

**4. Looking at Nature and Learning from it (20 minutes)**

Go and sit under a tree or a different plant. Think about its growth and life. What can you learn from observing the tree? (If the weather does not allow for this, maybe you can still take a small walk or look out a window to reflect on growth in nature.)

## 5. Prayerfully Connecting Scripture and Our Lives (20 minutes)

\_Read John 15:1-8 again. Slowly, Prayerfully. What catches your attention? How does this speak into your life today? Stay there in prayer. Write down what is significant for you.

(The Word of God may or may not connect directly with your experience of the past months – that’s o.k; just listen to what speaks to you today. Stay with one or two aspects of the passage; don’t try to understand or grasp everything.)

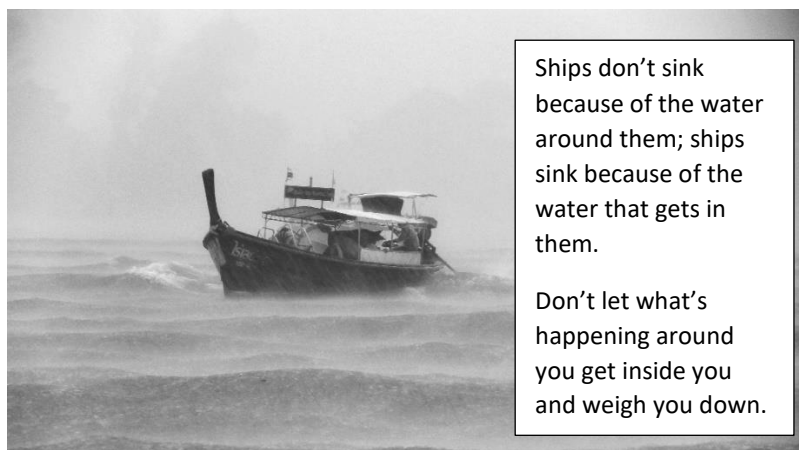
If you still have time, reflect and pray on the following: How can you make “remaining in Jesus” a priority as you journey onwards?

## 5. Closure (10 minutes)

\_Write one sentence to describe God – a sentence that captures what stood out to you about God this morning (e.g. God is working among us as gardener to bring fruit; Jesus in me and I in him – he is so very close):

.....

\_Write a short prayer of 2-3 sentences in response to what you have been hearing this morning:



Ships don't sink because of the water around them; ships sink because of the water that gets in them.  
  
Don't let what's happening around you get inside you and weigh you down.

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.”*

(John 14:1)