

Thank you for ordering this retreat. Please take a moment to read over this short guide which explains a bit more about how the retreats work, and will help you get the most out of the experience.

The Material

- **A River Runs Through It** has five parts. Each part has an **audio reflection** to listen to, you will receive the link to the audio reflections on email.
- The **transcript** of the audio reflection is in the booklet which you will receive by post or as a PDF. Each part also has a collection of **additional reflection material** on the same theme, and this is in the booklet too.
- I would generally recommend listening to the audio reflection first, and then going on to explore the additional written material. You can return to the audio as many times as you want.
- A range of material is offered, in the awareness that different things will appeal to different people. It's often a good idea to go where you feel drawn to, and spend more time with what has felt fruitful for you. But please also feel free to explore things which are new to you.

The Reflections

- All the audio reflections use the same basic structure. They are usually between 15 and 22 minutes long.
- First there is a little bit of **introduction** to the theme.
- Then there is a short **stilling exercise** to help reach a place of quietness amid the busyness of life which makes it easier to reflect and connect. If you are familiar with this practice, you might prefer to use your own exercise.
- The **reflection** on the theme for that week will often include Scripture, poetry and other creative or spiritual writing.
- You can pause the audio at any time if you'd like to spend more time with something, or you might prefer to listen all the way through once then return to elements of it.

Some General Hints

- It can be helpful to set aside both a **physical space** (a particular chair or corner) and a **time** for prayer. Going to the same space for each reflection time helps us prepare mentally as well as physically. Some people mark the time by lighting a candle.
- Begin each reflection time by taking a few moments to **be still**. Make sure you can sit quietly and comfortably, and put your phone on silent if you can. You might use a body awareness exercise, a breathing exercise, or the quiet repetition of a word or phrase. Remember, being still rarely comes naturally, and we need to be gentle with ourselves if we get distracted.
- Don't feel under pressure to get through everything. A good rule of thumb is that it is usually best to go deeper with a few things than to try to cover everything. Stay with what you feel drawn to, and if something is not suiting you, feel free to put it to one side and move on. That said, if something is disagreeing with you in a way which feels productive, it might be worth examining!
- **Art** and **poetry** can be helpful in shining fresh and unexpected light on a subject. It is worth spending a few minutes just looking at a image — you will notice more the longer you look — or reading a poem over several times. Notice details, phrases, moods. Follow what is standing out and notice is happening in you.
- Repetition can be valuable. Returning to a piece of material can yield fresh treasure the second time around.
- You might find it helpful to make a few notes on each time of reflection in a **notebook or journal**.
- After completing the five parts, you might like to add a "sixth part" to rest and spend some time going back to anything which has been particularly meaningful.

Some ways to reflect

Many of the guided reflections use elements of these traditional practices which have been used in spiritual reflection for centuries.

Lectio Divina

Read the passage slowly. Try to read with the eyes of the heart, rather than the head. Notice anything that's standing out to you, perhaps just a word or a phrase.

Meditate If something is standing out for you, stay with that, repeat it inwardly. Ask questions of it. Don't analyse it with your head, let it speak to you, let it tell you what it is about.

Pray Is there a response welling up in you? Is there something you would like to say to God, a question you would like to ask? Let that response come to the surface. Make that part of your prayer.

Contemplate You might find you reach a point where words are not necessary, where you want to sit with that image or idea, and let it sink in. Resting with it in God's presence, perhaps even the words melt away. This is the essence of contemplation.

Imaginative Contemplation

- Begin by acknowledging that you are in the presence of God, offer God your time and your imagination.
- Read the passage several times until it starts to feel familiar. Then take time to picture the scene in your imagination, use your senses, notice what you can see, hear, smell, taste, touch.
- Think about where you are as you watch the story unfold. Are you in the midst of things, one of the leading characters, or someone watching from the sidelines?
- Let the scene unfold naturally, without forcing it. If it starts to depart a bit from the biblical story, don't worry.
- If Jesus is in the story, what is he like? How does he deal with people? Do you approach him yourself, have a conversation with him? Notice what's going on in you as things are unfolding.
- When the story has finished, make a colloquy. Talk as freely as you can to God or to Jesus about what has happened for you.



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