

Winged Life Spiritual Direction and Retreats presents:

PEACE LIKE A RIVER

*A Guided, Self-Paced Retreat
to Nourish You and Aid in Discernment*

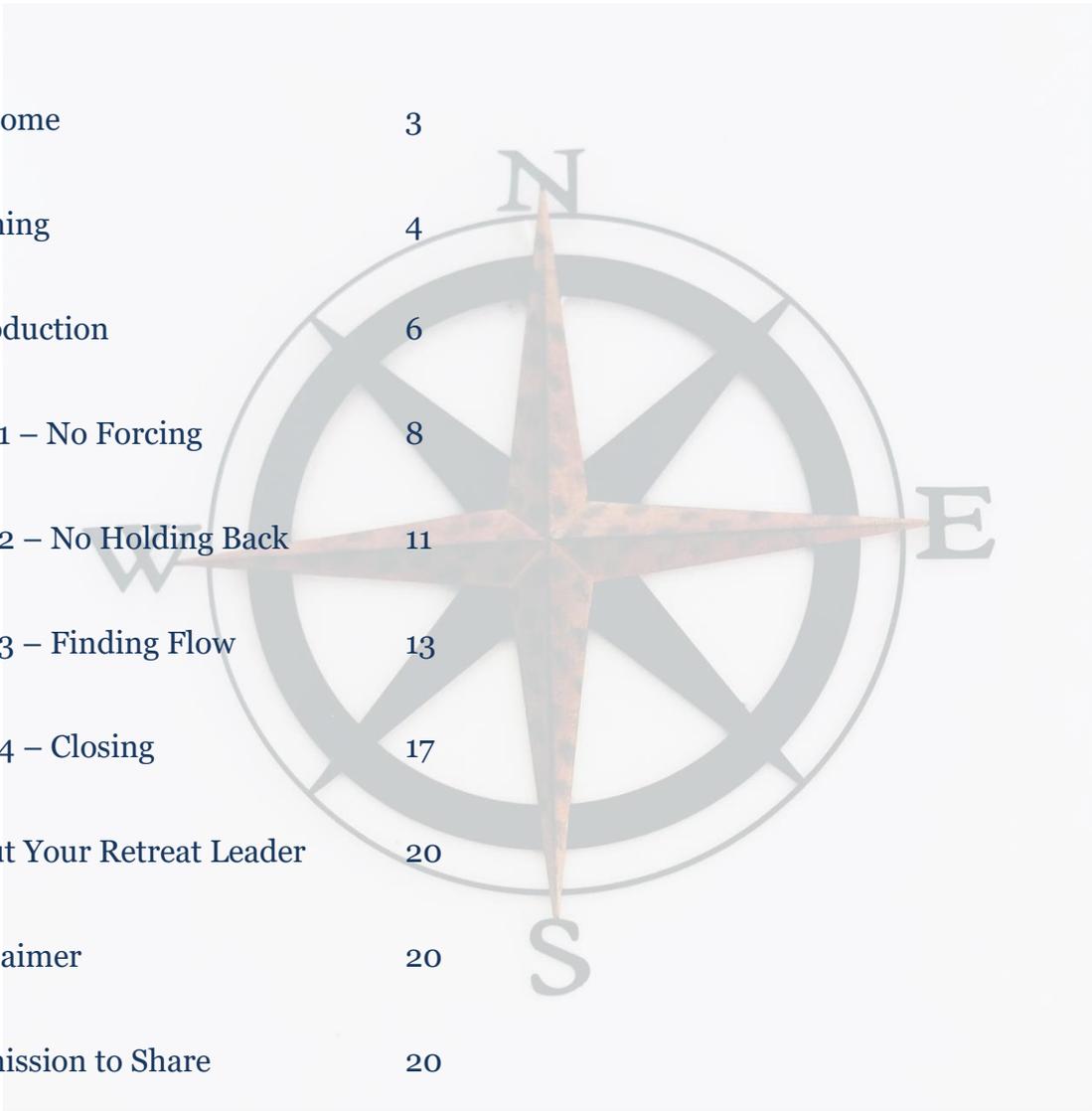


CHERYL LYON

Spiritual Director, Retreat Leader and Certified Life Coach

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Welcome!

Take a deep breath in, exhale through your mouth, and let your shoulders drop down (how did I know they were up around your ears?) Go ahead and take two more deep breaths, and with each one, welcome *yourself* to this time of retreat.

My desire and my prayer for you is that this time of retreat will be a relaxed but also insightful time, a time in which you can be immersed in the river of the Holy One. My prayer is that this retreat will nourish and restore any areas that feel depleted in you, and at the same time refresh and renew you to return to your work in the world with greater clarity, renewed energy and more purpose, peace and joy.

How to Prepare for Your Retreat No preparation is necessary – feel free to start right now! On the other hand, you may find that a bit of preparation will support your retreat time. Schedule a date and time, and line up a quiet space where you (with any luck) will not be interrupted for at least an hour or so. If you are a caregiver, try to line up help. Do what you can to make this retreat feel like a time apart – but *remember that the perfect retreat is the one you actually take*. If conditions are less than “perfect,” know that God will meet you where you are.

Plan to spend at least two hours with this retreat. A two to four-hour block of time would be great, but that may not fit your busy life. You can divide the retreat into one-hour segments or even smaller blocks of time. You may also choose take this retreat over a period of days or even weeks. If you do divide the retreat into segments, be sure to take a moment at the end of each segment to note your progress so far and where you want to start when you pick up again. Also note any insights or questions you have. And take a few moments at the beginning of the next segment to once again calm your nervous system, quiet your mind and open to Spirit.



Follow Your Own Leading Use these retreat materials in any way that works for you. If you like to follow a plan, just start at the beginning and work your way through. If you prefer to browse materials and start with what “calls out” to you, feel free to do that. If you feel an urge to linger with one activity for the entire period of time you’ve set aside for retreat, please do so – that may well be a holy nudge! You can always come back to the other activities at another time.

This is a self-paced retreat – there is no rush. Allow yourself time to reflect and ponder and listen for the voice of the Holy One.

Opening

Relax and Open to Nourishment and Wisdom

Whatever your motivation for taking this retreat, however unsettled you may be feeling, know that all you need to do is show up. And you’re already here!

Trust that God is also already present and will take care of the rest. There is no need to hurry or strive or try to “figure it out.” Allow yourself to be relaxed, open and curious about what may transpire.

Quiet and Center Yourself

Quiet and center your body, mind and spirit before beginning. If you’d like me to guide you through a 6 minute relaxation and centering experience, [click here to listen](#) (clicking will open a new page with an audio player, simply press the play button to begin).

Read Aloud:

For thus says the Lord:

“Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river,
and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream;
and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip,
and bounced upon her knees.

¹³As one whom his mother comforts,
so I will comfort you;
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

-Isaiah 66:12-13 (ESV)

Ponder: What has gotten in the way of peace lately? What would “peace like a river” mean to you? What would it feel like in your body? Are there ways in which you would like to be “comforted” right now?

Listen or Sing : Peace Like a River

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qL_hOEbRbco

Pause for one or more breaths.

Pray and

Ponder: Now
O Lord,
calm me into a quietness
that heals
and listens,
and molds my longings
and passions,
my wounds
and wonderings
into a more holy
and human
shape.
-Ted Loder

Introduction

This retreat was inspired by two lines of a longer poem by Rainer Maria Rilke:

May what I do flow from me like a river,
no forcing and no holding back.

And a few more lines by John O'Donohue:

I would love to live
Like a river flows,
Carried by the surprise
Of its own unfolding.

Would that our lives could always be like that! Flowing. No forcing. No holding back. Carried by the surprise of our own unfolding.

I don't know about you, but I quite often find myself either trying to "push the river" and *make* something happen, or holding back from what I feel led to do – procrastinating, staying silent, telling myself I'm not sure how to start or what the next step is. At other times, it seems as if someone has built a dam and blocked the river! There have also been occasions when I felt like I was about to drown in the storm savaged waters of life. And while an adventurous part of me would like to be "carried by the surprise of its own unfolding," another part of me would love to retain control and know exactly *where* we are going.

Ponder and Reflect

What about you? I'm guessing that if you decided to take this retreat today, you may be feeling depleted, confused, frustrated, or maybe just a little off-kilter. Take stock of where you are right now.

What's it like in the river of your life right now?

What's your initial reaction to the thought of "no forcing and no holding back"?

What questions do you have as you start this retreat?

What is your intention – your prayer – for this time of retreat?

Part 1 – No Forcing

Reflect



What comes to mind as you reflect upon these images?

Holy Reading (Lectio Divina)

Read the following passage slowly, preferably out loud. On this first reading, pay attention to any word or phrase that seems to stand out or grab your attention. Stay with this word or phrase for a few moments, just letting it resonate within you.

Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through
some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances
acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

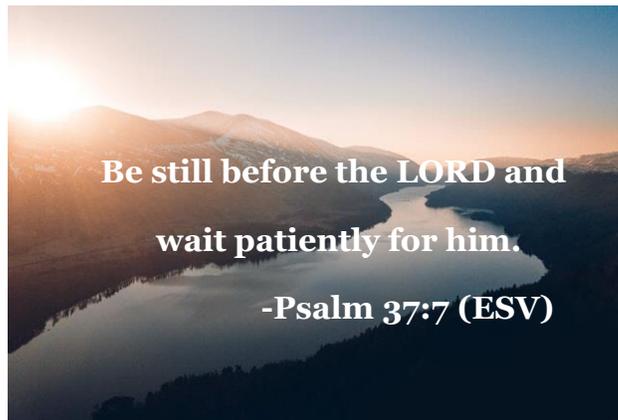
—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ
excerpted from *Hearts on Fire*

Read the passage again, and then reflect on how those words or phrases touch your life or circumstances today. What feelings do they bring up? What thoughts or memories arise? Do you find relief in them, or do you resist them? Where do you notice sensation in your body?

Read the passage out loud a third time. Consider whether there is an invitation for you in the passage. What might God be saying to you personally through this? What message might Life be giving you? You may wish to talk with God (pray), journal about the passage (write), or respond in some other fashion, perhaps by writing a poem, drawing or painting, or singing a song.

Rest. Rest with God in gentle, open, non-critical contemplation of this passage and how it relates to your life.

Notes:



Break

Time for a break! Take at least a 10-minute break before continuing (longer if you can), to let this portion of the retreat settle. Have a drink of water or a snack, do some stretches, or go for a walk. This is also a time you might check your messages, if that is essential. If it is not essential, then I strongly encourage you to resist the urge and wait until your retreat time is complete.

Part 2 – No Holding Back

Introduction

Sometimes we need to wait for God's timing. At others, it is clear that the time is now, and we are clear about what we're being called to do, but we hold back, drag our feet, procrastinate, dither. We tell ourselves we don't know whether the time is right, or we don't know how to approach the task or situation. We question whether we have the necessary skills or information to proceed. We worry that instead of helping, we might offend. We have trouble discerning which of many good things is ours to do, with the limited time and energy we are given. Or it feels as if we don't have time in our busy life to do this thing.



Read Twice, Slowly

The command which I enjoin on you today is not too mysterious and remote for you. It is not up in the sky...Nor is it across the sea...No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts, you have only to carry it out. -Deut 30:11-14 (NAB)

(Who knew that Nike was quoting Scripture with its “Just Do It” tagline?)

Reflect

Is there “something very near to you, already in your mouth and in your heart” that you have “only to carry it out”? What’s stopping you? What’s it costing you to NOT do it?

What if you already have everything you need? What if you did know what to do?

Break

Time for another break. Take at least a 10-minute break before continuing (longer if you can), to let this portion of the retreat settle. Have a drink of water or a snack, do some stretches, or go for a walk. This is also a time you might check your messages, if that is essential. Again, if it is not essential, then I encourage you to resist the urge and wait until your retreat time is complete. Allow yourself the spaciousness of empty time.

Part 3 – Finding “Flow”

Introduction

How do we navigate the tension between “trusting in the slow work of God” and taking action on what’s in front of us? How do we step into flow?

Read

“The Next Right Thing

Throughout our lives, we do only one thing – again and again, moment by moment, year after year. It is how we live our days, and it is how we shape our lives.

The choice is this: What is the next right thing for us to do?

Where, in this moment, shall we choose to place our time and attention? Do we stay or move, speak or keep silent, attend to this person, that task, move in this or that direction?

With each succeeding moment, we make a new choice. After each decision, there is another. And another. These are not enormous choices, decisions about whether to change careers, get married, or move to a new city. Our choices are small, quiet, intimate things that flow from us as water from a mountain spring, simple, endless, each thimble of water tumbling into the next, creating a small stream that somehow, with neither a map nor a plan, through surprising twists and curving around unforeseen obstacles, somehow inevitably finds its way down the mountain to the sea....

The stream is born of an ongoing relationship. Through a never-ending conversation between water, gravity, obstacles and earth, a relationship is born that, over time, gives birth to the astonishing miracle of what we call stream....

So it is with our lives. The only choice we make – what is the next right thing to do – responds to a similarly vital inner gravity, an invisible thread that shapes our life, as our life meets the world. Every single choice we make, no matter how small, is the ground where who we are meets what is in the world....



A life that becomes spacious and full is a life made of moments chosen carefully, decisions that each, one by one, lean into an abiding trust in the power of life, the fecundity of love, and the wholeness of our own heart's wisdom. Each choice that feels like the only and perfectly next right thing plants a tiny seed of ease and well-being in our day....

Many of us feel that the pace of our days is determined by external forces, relentless demands and requirements, the tyranny of our to-do list, our emails – that in fact our work and family responsibilities control our schedule, our time, and decide before we even get out of bed, the pace of our days.

What would it be like to attend more faithfully to the inner voices that speak to us of the way our body wants to move this day, the gentle tempo of our heart, the slower gait of a stroll – rather than a punishing marathon – through the events of the day? We tend to presume that pushing the pace of our days is the only way to make it through, to get caught up, to get things done. Yet how many of us have found, when all external pressure is relieved and we are left to our own natural rhythm, that we find we can actually get more things done, more easily and more effectively?...

Whatever we choose, however we decide to use our days, the shape of our days becomes the shape of our lives. For this and countless other reasons, many spiritual traditions focus their practice on the way we most honorably and authentically place our heart's best attention on one single day. As the psalmist reminds us, this is the day the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

-Wayne Muller, excerpted from *A Life of Being, Having and Doing Enough*

Reflect

What is your reaction to this idea of “the next right thing?”

What supports “flow” in your life? What supports flow in your work in the world (whether paid or unpaid)?

Do your riverbanks need shoring up? What structures or boundaries might support flow (e.g., regular spiritual practice, 1/2 day a month spent on long-term planning, weekly family or team meetings, more sleep)?

Do you resist asking for help or support? If so, what help or support might you look for, to help you move forward?

Have you prayed or journaled about the next right thing? _____

What does it feel like when you're experiencing "flow"? What does it feel like in your body? In your mind? In your spirit?

Think back to a time when you had to make an important decision – one that turned out to be right for you. How did you know what to do and when it was time to act? What sensations in your body, thought patterns or other indicators gave you the final signal? Have you experienced the same thing more than once, or different things for different decisions?

What might it be like to move through your day just choosing "the next right thing"? Even when responding to interruptions?

Listen and Reflect You are the River, I am the Flow (song by Jan Phillips)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLY7hvlGKPY&list=RDBLY7hvlGKPY&start_radio=1&t=17

Part 4- Closing

Closing Prayer

I PRAISE YOU FOR WHAT IS YET TO BE

By Ted Loder (from his book, *Guerillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle*)

Wondrous Worker of Wonders,
I praise you, not alone for what has been,
or for what is,
but for what is yet to be,
for you are gracious beyond all telling of it.
I praise you
that out of the turbulence of my life
a kingdom is coming,
is being shaped even now
out of my slivers of loving,
my bits of trusting,
my sprigs of hoping,
my tootles of laughing,
my drips of crying,
my smidgens of worshiping;
that out of my songs and struggles,
out of my griefs and triumphs,
I am gathered up and saved,
for you are gracious beyond all telling of it.
I praise you
that you turn me loose
to go with you to the edge of now and maybe,
to welcome the new,
to see my possibilities,
to accept my limits,
and yet begin living to the limit
of passion and compassion
until, released by joy,
I uncurl to other people
and to your kingdom coming,
for you are gracious beyond all telling of it.

Pray God, you are truly gracious beyond all telling of it. As I close this retreat and head back into my day, I thank you not only for what has been and what is, but also for what is yet to be. I ask that you weave together my slivers of loving, my bits of trusting, my sprigs of hoping, my tootles of laughing, and my smidgens of worshiping to serve the good of all, in your timing. Help me to trust in your slow work, O God, for you are, truly, gracious beyond all telling of it. Amen.

Reflect

Looking back over this period of retreat, what stands out? What do you particularly want to remember? How will you help yourself remember?

How might you carry this time of retreat forward with you into your daily life?

Blessing

May the way forward be made clear to you. May you flow like a river, with no forcing and no holding back. And may you be delighted by the surprise of your own unfolding.

Know that I am praying for you.

Follow Up

One way of cementing your learning and carrying this retreat time forward is to share your experience with another person. I would welcome an e-mail or phone call from you telling me about your experience in as much or as little detail as you wish. You can reach me at cheryl@wingedlifecoaching.com or call me at 607-316-8382.

I will send you a couple of follow up e-mails to help you make the most of this retreat, and you will also receive my monthly-ish newsletter with inspiration for your spiritual journey and notification of future events. You may of course, unsubscribe at any time using the unsubscribe link in the e-mail. If you received this retreat from a friend and would like to get the follow up e-mails and newsletter, you can sign up at <https://wingedlifecoaching.com> .

If you enjoyed this retreat, please share it, in its entirety, with others!

Blessings,

-Cheryl



About Your Retreat Leader and “River Guide”



Cheryl Lyon is a spiritual director, retreat leader and life coach located near Binghamton, NY. She is available to lead individual or group spiritual direction for lay persons or clergy, as well as half or whole day retreats, in person or by phone, Skype or Zoom. She is always happy to speak with spiritual seekers and is also available to consult with anyone who is developing a retreat or spiritually formative activities for their own church or group.

Cheryl’s personal interests include her family (married 37 years, one daughter), hiking and biking, the Adirondacks, travel, quilting and the arts. Contact Cheryl at cheryl@wingedlifecoaching.com or learn more about her at <https://wingedlifecoaching.com/cheryl-lyon/>

Disclaimer

The information, exercises and techniques presented in this retreat are not a substitute for counseling, psychotherapy or medical care. If you are in counseling or therapy, please consult your therapist before using these or other self-help methods.

Permission to Share

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