



creating a group retreat experience

Sacred Pause: A Creative Retreat for the Word-Wearied Christian takes seriously Jesus' invitation to receive the Kingdom as children: with wonder and joy and creativity and movement and playfulness, all of which help us to set aside our usual routines for an unexpected encounter with God. Though *Sacred Pause* is written as an individual respite, all of the material was originally created for and tested in large groups – both worship and retreat settings. Adapting the book for a group experience can be simple; these hints will get you started!

1. Set the tone with space. Whether your group will be meeting for an intensive retreat or across several weeks/months in regularly scheduled meetings, set the tone for a wonder-full experience by gathering the group in a spacious area that offers room for movement and by providing artistic supplies for the group.

2. Begin with prayer. Warm up the group's creative spirit by beginning each session with an exercise in prayer-writing. Several leadership suggestions and writing prompts for prayer-writing are provided in the *Writing to God* discussion guide, a free pdf on paracletepress.com. Encourage prayers to be written with crayons and markers.

3. One chapter = one session. Each chapter of *Sacred Pause* provides enough content for one meeting or session, anywhere from 1 to 2 hours depending on the group's pace and conversation, with the inclusion of time for storytelling, silence, and possibly silliness. Two chapters can be merged to provide the content for a full morning or afternoon session.

- If your group is meeting on a weekly or monthly schedule, assign one chapter to be experienced before each gathering. Invite reflections on the chapters with questions like "What made you giggle? What caused you to sigh? What were the moments of struggle or disconnect?"
- If your group is gathered for a retreat, the leader can guide the group through each chapter's activities, inviting responses to each exercise and encouraging conversation related to each chapter's text. Ask questions such as "What resonates with you? What surprises or unsettles you?"

4. Add words and verses. With each chapter, the exercises provided are only the beginning! What other words might be doodled in chapter two or expanded in chapter six? What verses might the group pose to one another for fill-in-the-blank challenges with chapter five or for creatively concise summaries with chapter ten? A large group in a retreat setting can be separated into smaller groups to craft new exercises for the other small groups.

5. Get moving. Several chapters in *Sacred Pause* provide exercises that take us out of our seats. Set time aside in your retreat for movement – physical stretches and silly faces with chapter one, a leisurely stroll with camera phones in hand for chapter three, small group break-outs to write laud-libs for chapter eight, and personal time spent in silence with chapter eleven.

6. Use your own theme. *Sacred Pause* can serve as a retreat theme by itself, but perhaps your group already has a preset theme or central scripture for its time together. Use the book's activities to bring a refreshing approach to your existing plans! As a group, listen for the sounds and rhythms of the words central to your theme, question the assumptions and imagine untold stories surrounding the chosen bible verses, paraphrase and play with your chosen material.