



Relationship Retreat #1

A basic acronym to assess your emotional stability is **HALT**. Am I **H**ungry? Am I **A**ngry? Am I **L**onely? Am I **T**ired? If you answer yes to any of those, then wisdom would say to stop (**Halt**) before you act.

These days, we might need to acknowledge other acronyms, such as **SAD**, for **S**tressed, **A**nxious, and **D**epressed. Or maybe **OPEN**, for **O**verwhelmed, in **P**ain, **E**motionally spent, and **N**eedy.

None of us has ever lived through a world-wide pandemic, an economic downturn, and a virtual lock-down all at once. It's no wonder that we have negative reactions and that our relationships may be taking a hit.

Obviously, there is no one-size-fits-all answer. Nor is it helpful to quote faith-based generalities that disregard the individuality of relationships.

However, if you've read this far, it's probably true you'd like to ease the stress and issues you now face. We pray your genuine desire to make things better and the "all-in" heart of God for you and those you love will be rewarded as you Halt, face your Sadnesses, and Open to what God can do.

The following is a self-guided retreat to help you engage your relationship realities.

The focus is you, although there may be issues and concerns you want to see changed in others. God's work begins in us. God's healing and transformation is offered to you. His invitation is for you to come to him, laying your burdens and problems at his feet in order to hear and know his heart for you.

Before you begin:

1. Plan an uninterrupted time away from distractions and noise. If you are quarantined with family members, you may need to find an outside space, go be in your car, or wait until others in your home are asleep. Try to plan several hours, if possible.

2. Gather your Bible and a notebook. You may want quiet music if it helps you focus, but plan for an extended time of silence as that allows your mind to detach from outside input.
3. Pray beforehand, preparing your mind, will, emotions, and body to be in a space with God. Ask for the infusion of God's grace, trusting that He is present with you, no matter the problem or the pain.

Begin

1. **Slowly read Psalm 139: 1-18, 23-24. Notice if there are words or phrases that are meaningful for you. Make note of them without trying to understand them. Just notice what you notice. You may want to read the psalm more than once, paying attention to your thoughts and emotions.**

You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.

²You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.

⁵You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.

⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

⁷Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,

¹⁰even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"

¹²even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

¹³For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.

²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting

2. When you are ready, pray the words or phrases that came to light for you. Pray your feelings. Try to refrain from analyzing. Simply put yourself before God with what has surfaced for you.

You may want to imagine God (the Father, or Jesus, or the Spirit) as a personal loving companion who understands completely. Remind yourself of his love, and open to that.

3. Express (maybe by writing) what it is you want. You may try writing a psalm, or a prayer, a lament, a memory, a hope, a hurt.
4. Stop to breathe. Stop to stop. Stop to listen. Ask God into your reality. You may want to say something like, “Lord, I invite you into my _____ (name whatever you have noticed). I invite you into the reality of things I cannot change. I invite you into my mind, my emotions, my will, my motivations, my desires, my relationship. Here I am.”
5. Take time to move your body, or change locations, or walk, or look up and out. Allow space. Allow the Spirit. Do not force answers or formulate plans. Trust that God is present and good, even if you are not aware of any particular response. Right now, the point is not to develop strategy. Right now, be God’s child.
6. If Scripture comes to mind, read it. If you need to pray, do that. If you need to release anger, hurt, misunderstanding, hatred, unforgiveness, fear, irritation, selfishness, or other emotions, name them and offer them to God, without guilt or shame. You may want to hold open hands out, giving to God whatever you have to give him. You may want to picture an altar where you bring these things to God.

Is it a relief to unburden yourself? Is it hard to let some things go? Do you sense God’s acceptance? Do you feel peace, or is there something blocking peace? Can you name your fears? Can you identify your needs? Do you hear/sense God’s response? Is there a Scripture coming to mind?

7. Read Galatians 5:13-26. Again, go slow and pay attention to what you notice. Pray to hear God for you.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery;²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking, and envying each other.

- 8. Are you being invited to:**
- admit a sin**
 - confess an attitude or action,**
 - release a grudge,**
 - examine a motive,**
 - grieve an injustice,**
 - recognize a habit or pattern,**
 - see a dream,**
 - understand a different viewpoint,**
 - face anger,**
 - remember a goodness,**
 - ask for help,**
 - embrace forgiveness,**
 - receive mercy,**
 - acknowledge wrongdoing,**
 - validate your worth,**

hope,
give,
turn,
let go,
kneel,
try,
wait,
stand,
surrender,
love.

Take time here. Ask to be sure you are hearing the Holy Spirit and not old messages, past refrains, or ingrained patterns. Pray for the Spirit's leading and his power to trust and respond.

9. **Receive encouragement from God's word to you.**

The faithful love of the LORD never ends. His mercies never cease.
Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.
Lamentations 3:22-23

But now, this is what the LORD says—
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
you are precious and honored in my sight,
and because I love you,
Do not be afraid, for I am with you. Is 43: 1-5 (selected) NIV

The Lord GOD has given me
the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain with a word
him who is weary.
Morning by morning he awakens;
he awakens my ear
to hear as those who are taught.
The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious;
I turned not backward. Is 50:4-5 ESV

Jesus says: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.” John 15:9 ESV

“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Live within my love.” TLB

10. As you leave your time of retreat, think about several things for which you are grateful. Maybe it’s something that happened today with God. Or it may be people in your life...even the difficult ones. It may be ways you have been shown love. Pray your gratefulness.

Go in peace.