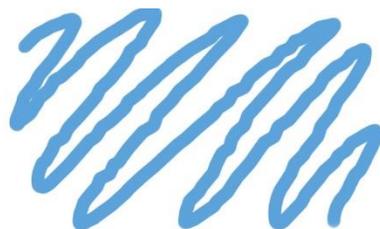


# *Before I Go*

*A One day personal retreat  
To focus on  
Gratitude, Forgiveness, and  
End of Life*



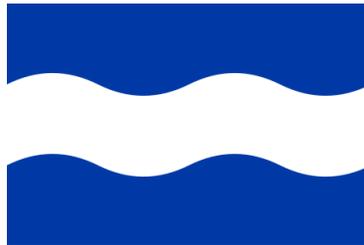
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*“In the rush and noise of life, as you have intervals, step within yourselves and be still. Wait upon God and feel his good presence; this will carry you through your day’s business.”*

*-William Pen*

## Introduction



Working as a hospice chaplain taught me many things about life and death in America. I learned that most of us don’t spend much time reflecting upon our lives until we’re at the end of them and even then, many of us avoid self-reflection. At an early age, we begin to move at break-neck speeds, trying to keep up or catch up or move ahead and except for a few lucky ones, poets, monks, those with lots of free time, we rarely take the time to consider what we want our lives to be about, what they really are about, and what we want or need to do before it all comes to a screeching halt.

In 2015, frustrated with what often felt to me like a lack of personal engagement with terminally ill people I decided I wanted to take some time to study more fully the thoughts and ideas of people about end of life and I proposed a period of research to measure that important time in life. I wanted to know what people really want at end of life, what people tell their loved

ones that they want, and how our faith, our values, those ideas we claim to hold most dear influence those decisions. I wanted to know if belief in God shaped the choices we make about aggressive treatments and what it means to “give up”. I wanted to explore how and what people choose when faced with a terminal diagnosis.

The Louisville Institute was kind and generous enough to provide funding for this study through their Pastoral Study Grant and throughout the winter and spring of 2016, I sent out two different surveys and also interviewed a number of people about these topics. Many people from Washington, New Mexico, North Carolina, and beyond were kind enough to respond to my questions; but as I read the first batch of surveys then created another tool and distributed that one, I realized I was not quite addressing what I wanted to know. There seemed to be more I was after.

Although the survey recipients were thoughtful and intentional in answering the questions I proposed and were willing to consider end of life issues, I read the second surveys and felt once again as if I still was not quite getting to what it is I wanted to know. After a few weeks of quiet discontent, I discovered what I thought was missing. Perhaps before we contemplate end of life choices and preferences we have for our deaths, we need to ponder our lives. We need to examine the beginning of life and the middle of life, the values we hold and whether or not our life choices have reflected and continue to reflect those values.

I realized that we need time to forgive and be forgiven, time to count our blessings, realize the gifts and experiences that have shaped us and ultimately let go of the fears that have held us back. We need the opportunity to consider what we have done so far in our living and then what we want to do with the time we hope we have left. It is not just an end of life conversation I was missing from my patients. It is not just being intentional about our desires for

how we leave this life. It is more than just a list of our wishes when we face death, more than just writing a will or planning a memorial service.

It is my thought that we all need to stop even if it is for just a day and reflect not just upon how we want to die but also upon the lives we are currently living. Yes, that list of wishes is vital, having a will is crucial, completing advance care directives and letting our loved ones know what we want if unable to make our wishes known to healthcare providers is nothing less than the right thing to do and a list of resources is available at the end of this booklet to help you do those things. But this project, this retreat day model is meant to offer you more. It's meant to give you the opportunity to set aside time and reflect upon what life, what *your* life has been about and what you want it to be about before you find yourself at the end of it. More than just considerations about end of life it is my hope that we take the opportunity to consider all of life.

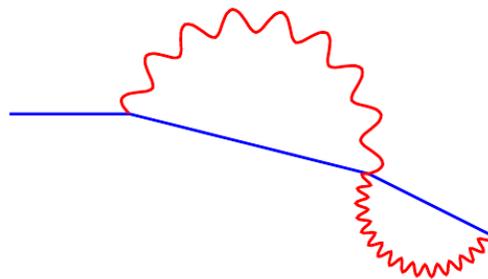
***Before You Go*** is a one day retreat experience meant to focus your attention on certain aspects of your life as well as what is important for you to complete or address before it is all over. It is meant to be done in solitude, with seriousness and good intent; but also with a bit of humor, some ease. It is written in a format that I hope is simple to follow and will help you get to a place of deep reflection about your life, what you want in life and what has kept you from having it up to this point. I hope you will entertain ideas about what will enable you to move in a direction to discover and accomplish what you need before you run out of time.

Although this experience is not intended to provide you with all the answers you may want, my hope that it will at least raise important questions you would like to continue to explore. This day may not help you finish any project you might wish to complete, however, it is my hope that it will help focus you on what projects you might wish to begin. And even though this will take just one day for you to move through the assignments and prompts, work through

the questionnaires and take the time to ponder, it is meant to help remind you of what you want to be about and what needs to be done in your life to help you achieve those goals.

It is the purpose of this one day retreat to lead you to a place of self-reflection of what has been important in your life, what is now important, and what you desire for your end of life experience. It's a lot to consider but I hope it is a good beginning for you to understand more fully your values, your purpose, your desires, and become more intentional about living out what you say is important. I am convinced that doing this, being intentional and being reflective will ease the trauma of end of life and better equip you when it is time to say goodbye.

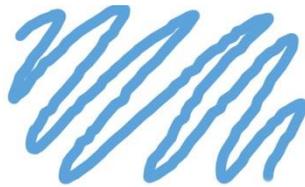
I invite you to take this opportunity, set aside a personal day to rest, reflect, meditate, and consider what your life has been about, what it is about, and what you want it to be about before you go.



*“If you cannot find terrain magnificent enough to take your breath away, gravitate to places that can at least increase your heart beat.”*

*-Gary Nabhan, *Songbirds, Truffles, & Wolves**

## **Preparing for Your Spiritual Retreat Day**



It would be lovely if you were able to mark a date on the calendar and set aside time to be in a place of inspiration and solitude, to make a pilgrimage to a designated sacred place, to carve out a time and travel somewhere that you expect silence and beauty. If you are in a position to do that, by all means make that happen. Where do you go for retreat? Is it possible for you to rent a room at the beach or near the mountains? Do you know of a monastery or convent that welcomes retreatants? Do you have the time to research a place you have always wanted to go and have the resources to make that happen? If so, that would be ideal for your spiritual retreat experience. It is well worth the money and the time to “go away” to wilderness or to a place of beauty to carry out the activities of this event.

Not everyone can do that. The inability to go somewhere, to withdraw to another place, should not prohibit you from being able to have this retreat. You can do this anywhere, in your noisy apartment or in your shared residence. This is not about place; it’s about intention. It is about planning for solitude, creating your own experience, by setting aside the time to be alone and in silent reflection. That **does** mean you will need to carve out an entire day for this and it

**does** mean you will need to be alone; but where you do that does not matter. If you can't do it in your residence, see if a local church will permit you to use their space or find a friend that might let you use their house and yard for this day. You don't have to be rich to be creative, find a day and then find a spot where you can be alone. You will need to be inside for some of the retreat and you will need a place to be outside, if weather permits.

**Preparation #1: You will need an entire day to be alone and you will need to complete this retreat experience in that one day.**

This preparation in itself may take you some time to arrange. Finding childcare or rearranging work schedules, making sure you can spend a day without interruptions may cost you. This is worth it and is necessary. One day, eight hours, alone and uninterrupted. This means, no cell phones, no Internet, no breaks to look at Facebook or Twitter. Unplug, let loved ones know you are unavailable, do what you need to do to carve out and protect this day. It is meant to keep a focus, not a day of contemplation to which you can come and go. Your commitment to refrain from distractions will allow you to dig deep, stay focused, and work the program.

This day is meant to begin around nine o'clock in the morning and go until just after five in the evening. If it is most helpful for you to spend the night somewhere to make certain you have the entire day available to you, then spend the rest of the time resting, journaling, or reading inspirational material. If you are able to extend this retreat experience, by all means, do so, but for this event, it is vital that you carve out at least one full day of being alone and "unplugged."

Work the program all the way through. These exercises can be done alone. You could take one prompt and work on it for a week and then choose another for a later date; but that is

not how this retreat experience has been devised. Just as morning moves to midday and afternoon precedes an evening, the late day prompts are built upon the early day events. Meditations are meant to follow the work. Reflections move throughout the day and have a specific progression. It is most helpful to complete the work in one day, not to break up the exercises or just to work on one part.

By choosing to complete this one day retreat, you are committing to working through the exercises as they are arranged. You may find you want to linger on one for a longer period of time than allowed or that you finish with another in less time. Try to stay within the prescribed itinerary. You can return to an exercise later or you can rest and reflect if you get done early. Of course, this is your day and you can use it as you like; but if you are able, let the day as it is prescribed be a structure for you. There is purpose in how it has been created.

**Preparation #2: You will need the following items:**

**A couple of pens and a journal that you are comfortable writing in.**

**Three or four notecards and envelopes.**

**Five of your favorite songs.** These can be available on your phone in a playlist or on CD's that you are able to play. Make sure that whatever device you are using will not provide other distractions. If you plan to play the songs on your smartphone, turn off other notifications that might lead you to listen to voice mail or pick up messages. Be intentional about these five songs; think about your choices and make them readily available for your day.

**Food and drink:** You will begin after breakfast so you will need a late morning snack, a bag lunch, and an afternoon snack. You will need water to drink. Please make healthy choices for your retreat day. Fruit and vegetables are best. Pick items that you like; take the time to honor

your preferences but do try to prepare snacks and lunch that are nutritious and light. If you are using a part of the house for privacy, don't require that you have to go into a kitchen that might cause you to run into others and lose the aspect of solitude you have created for yourself. The times for nourishment and your midday meal are structured to work with the day's other activities. You will practice mindful eating and silence so plan well.

**A book that inspires you:** This could be sacred texts like the Bible, a book of poetry or meditations, a memoir or collection of essays that are meaningful to you. If it's a novel or fiction, select passages that inspire you and plan ahead, finding the author or poet that has moved you with their words. This can be a familiar book, one that you have already read or it can be a new one that perhaps you have set aside. Perhaps, you want to purchase a book you have heard about. There won't be a great amount of time to read but there will be some time set aside in the day to hear from authors you admire.

**Crayons or colored pencils:** Don't freak out if you aren't an artist! This is just for your eyes only. No pressure, there will simply be an exercise in which colors will be important. Have fun. Pick yourself out some crayons!

**Sacred items to create an altar:** Find a few things that you consider sacred. For instance: my altar would include a small carving of two bears joined together which was a gift on my 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, a tiny antique pitcher from my grandmother's shelves, a feather found on a hike, and a stone shaped like a heart.

Just search around your home or office and find a few things that symbolize "sacred" to you and bring them with you to create a small altar in the place where you will have your retreat. Also, bring a candle and matches (make sure you are able to light a candle in your retreat space; if a lighted candle is not allowed, find a battery operated one that you can turn on and off during

the day.), a colored scarf or table runner to use around your sacred items, and a small bowl and a container of water. (This can be in a bottle or in a pitcher or other container.) You will begin the day by pouring water in the bowl and end the day pouring the water on the ground. This bowl will remain on your altar throughout the day.

**Preparation #3: Complete all the activities for the day.**

It might be tempting to bypass the exercises that are difficult or seem unappealing. Stay with the program. Don't look ahead for something more interesting. Try what is being offered to you. Do all the activities, no matter how silly or insignificant one might seem.

**Preparation #4: Don't skim the rest of this booklet. Don't read ahead. Wait until your designated day begins and then turn this page.**

This is an experiential retreat day. Looking ahead, trying to plan what you might work on or gathering ideas before the day is not the point of this experience. You want to be fully present in your day, each exercise new and calling forth first thoughts. You can skim and read the books listed in the appendix later but this booklet is your guide for your retreat day; it is not information to glean for future plans or ideas.

As you move through your retreat day, explore those thoughts and feelings that emerge. Allow yourself to work with whatever comes forward. There is no right way to answer the questions or complete the exercises. There is no designated way to think or feel as you progress through this event. It is impossible to fail.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to facilitate this experience of retreat and reflection. Thank you for being willing to explore your thoughts and values about life and death. Blessings to you in this day of remembrance and discovery!

**Please refrain from looking ahead in the booklet until you begin your retreat day.**



*“A strange passion is moving in my head. My heart has become a bird which searches in the sky. Every part of me goes in different directions. Is it really so that the one I love is everywhere?”*

*-Rumi*



## **Invitation**

### **9:00 am**

Welcome to this day of reflection and retreat. For this one day, this holy and set apart day, you are invited to let yourself think and feel, remember, reflect, hope, regret, expect. It is a day designed for you to pay attention to your life, to your values, to the formative factors, to what you had hoped your life would be and what it has actually become. And it is a day finally to consider what you anticipate and desire for your end of life experience.

As you begin, find your sacred objects, your scarf or runner, your candle and matches or battery-operated candle, your empty bowl and container of water. Using these items, find a flat surface (table top, top of desk, even a corner on the floor) and create your altar. Once the altar is created, pour water from the container into the bowl. This is to signify the beginning of your retreat. You are inviting the sacred waters, the spiritual refreshment that is awaiting you, into this space. You are opening yourself to the goodness in this day. Put the container aside and find a

comfortable place to sit where you can see your altar and take a few minutes to consider where you are right now. Think about the room, the location, all that is around you.

What is this place that you have designated as this holy space for your solitude and reflection? Notice what you see near you, the walls, the floor, where you are sitting right now, what you see around you. Take a moment to honor what you see.

Now close your eyes. What do you hear? Are there noises or is this a silent place? Name for yourself every noise you can decipher. Are there any smells? Take a breath in through your nose? Anything? Take a moment and let your senses tell you about this place. Imagine this as a holy place. Imagine that God is all around you in this space.

Now, that you are aware of this place you have chosen to retreat, take a few deep breaths. Close your eyes once again. How are you feeling this morning? Are you nervous? Are there details from your normal life that concern you? Are you thinking about things you forgot to do? Are there tasks left waiting? Is there someone you are worried about in this choice you have made to be away?

What are the day to day burdens you bring with you today? Consider what you have brought along and in your mind, envision gently placing those concerns and worries somewhere on your altar to be guarded until the end of the day and you are ready to pick them back up again. Think about the concerns you have right now and let them be released, kept on the altar, in God's hands, as you begin this day

Now, consider what you hope for this day, what you have been expecting as you have made preparations. Do you anticipate deep reflection? Are you just hoping for a day of solitude? What is it you desire in choosing to have this retreat experience?

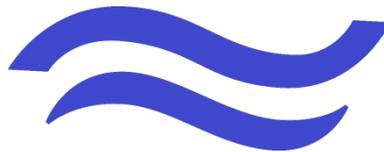
Think of a word that expresses a hope or desire for the day. It might be *peace* or *quiet* or *answers* or *joy*. Find one word that speaks to what you want for today. Keep your eyes closed. With a deep breath in, hold it for a few seconds, and then exhale saying that word. Do this five times. Breathe in, hold the breath, exhale saying the word. When you have said your word for the day, reflect on this sentence written by Barbara Holland.

**“Gloom we have always with us, a rank and sturdy weed, but joy requires tending.”**

Using this sentence, replace the word *joy* with the word you have chosen as your mantra for today. Fill in the blank using the word you have chosen. Now say this three times slowly.

**“Gloom we have always with us, a rank and sturdy weed, but \_\_\_\_\_ requires tending.”**

After having said this sentence three times, take a few more breaths and then take out your journal. Write the chosen word, using the crayons or colored pencils you brought with you. Choose colors that speak to you and about the word. Decorate the word if you like. When you have finished, tear out the page and place it on your altar. When you are ready, turn the page to see the day’s itinerary and begin with the first exercise.



*“The road stretches out before me. I know I will encounter obstacles. The path will sometimes appear circuitous or worse, perilous. I have fears. But still, I go.”*

*-Joseph Dispenza*

## Itinerary



9:00	Beginning
9:20	Where I'm From
10:20	Meditation
10:30	A Timeline of Teachers: An exercise in Gratitude
11:15	Meditation
12:00	Nourishment and Nature
1:00	Forging to Forgiveness
2:30	Meditation and Music
3:00	A Memory from this Life: “The Best Day”
3:30	A Mandala for End of Life
4:00	“Before I Go”
5:00	A Meditation for Ending the Day

*“I am only lost if I am going someplace in particular.”*  
-Megan Scribner



## Where I'm From

9:20

We start with what we have, what has made us. The genes, the generational pain, the hopes and dreams of grandparents and great-grandparents, the stories we don't even know but that still shaped us. We start with so much flowing through our veins, so much that comes from the narratives of those we call family. Our mother's fears, our father's failures, the secrets, the suffering, the sorrows, the expectations, we are more than just ourselves.

Today we begin with a glance at the past, a morning hour spent on where we've come from. Using the poem by George Ella Lyon, reflect upon what has shaped you. Don't think so much about your hopes and talents and unique qualities but rather consider those of your parents and grandparents. Think of your history. Where did you come from? What are the places, the experiences that contribute to your life story?

Read Lyon's poem and then take an hour to consider where it is that you come from. Think about all the stories you have ever heard about your family and write a page or two in your journal addressing your beginnings, using the format of the first line and last line being: **Where I'm From.**

## Where I'm From

I am from clothespins,  
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.  
I am from the dirt under the back porch.  
(Black, glistening,  
it tasted like beets.)  
I am from the forsythia bush  
the Dutch elm  
whose long-gone limbs I remember  
as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,  
from Imogene and Alafair.  
I'm from the know-it-alls  
and the pass-it-ons,  
from Perk up! and Pipe down!  
I'm from He restoreth my soul  
with a cottonball lamb  
and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,  
fried corn and strong coffee.  
From the finger my grandfather lost  
to the auger,  
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box  
spilling old pictures,  
a sift of lost faces  
to drift beneath my dreams.  
I am from those moments--  
snapped before I budded --  
leaf-fall from the family tree.

-George Ella Lyon



# MEDITATION

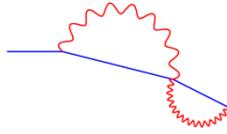
**10:20**

When you have written your poem of where you're from, light the candle on your altar and read it slowly to yourself three times. Put down your journal and close your eyes and envision the places and people you have come from. Think of them in kindness, surrounded in God's light. When you are ready, open your eyes and blow out the candle.



*“Treat no one lightly and think nothing is useless, for everyone has a moment and everything has its place.”*

-Ben Azzai (Jewish sage from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century)



# **Timeline of Teachers**

## **An experience of Gratitude**

### **10:30**

This exercise is the opportunity to focus on the people and events that have shaped you. Hopefully, each of us has people that pointed us in the right direction or influenced us in some way. We are who we are because of the “teachers” along the way. Maybe it was a school teacher or a coach, maybe it was the youth pastor or a neighbor, maybe it was a grandparent or the parent of your best friend, but hopefully we all had someone who took the time to encourage us, to bless us, to keep us from heading down the wrong path.

Some have said that it was cancer that was their greatest teacher or making a particular move to a new place. Others have noted it was a relationship or the break-up of one that served as their greatest teacher. I have included an essay by counselor Jim Allen to inspire you before you begin. You will find this on the next page. Go ahead and read it and then come back to the instructions below.

For this exercise you will use the timeline created on the page 22. Above each period in your life, jot down the names of the teachers from that period. Whether it was a parent or family member, someone in the classroom, or an event, above the designated area, write down the name of the teachers that influenced you.

There will be another part of this exercise given to you once the timeline is complete.

Teachers  
By Jim Allen

Most of the really important things I have learned, I have learned from children, first my own and then all the others whom I have met throughout my career. When I first thought about writing about the pint sized teachers in my life, I was overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. And then I decided to limit my writing to one very special little girl. I knew from the beginning that she was special when she became my first self-referred seven year-old.

My work in Montana was devoted primarily to the treatment of sexually abused kids. One day as a foster mother was dropping off another of her kids for a group therapy session, a little girl whom I had never met came over to where I was sitting and whispered that she needed to see me. Later when I asked her foster mother about it, she told me that the kid was right, she did need to see me, adding that her grandfather had been arrested for sexually abusing not only \*Michelle but several of her friends as well. When she added that her grandfather had committed suicide shortly thereafter I knew I was in for one of the most heart wrenching cases of my career.

Needless to say, it's not hard to feel anger towards people who have hurt children in this despicable way. Indeed one of the most difficult challenges faced by therapists in these circumstances is keeping their own feelings in check to avoid inhibiting the child from expressing theirs.

I often use therapeutic writing in my work with children and from the start encouraged \*Michelle to write her story. She was a very bright creative kid who loved to write for me and produced some really neat stuff *until* I suggested that she write about her grandfather. And then she drew a total blank. Sensing the enormity of what I was asking of her I backed off for several weeks until one day when she was looking out the window of my basement office. From that perspective all we could see was a small patch of blue sky.

As she stood looking up at that small swatch of the big Montana sky, she said, "Sometimes when I look at the sky, it's like I'm looking into the waters of the next earth. And the birds flying in our sky are like the fish swimming in the waters of the next earth."

I knew immediately that something that poetic...*that spiritual*, had to be significant and responded by saying, "Hey kid! I think you just wrote the first lines of your story."

"I did?" she asked with genuine surprise.

"I think so," I added as I went to my lap top and typed out what she had said. When I handed it over to her, she read what she had written and smiled as she acknowledged that it did sound pretty good. But when I encouraged her to continue she shook her head and passed the lap top back to me saying that she didn't know what else to say. While I had no idea where it might take her, I desperately wanted her to take the next step, and I fell back on a sentence completion technique I use to help kids get past writer's blocks. I wrote, "When I look *into* the next earth..." and handed it back to her.

She wrote, "I see my grandfather..." and handed it back to me.

I wrote, "He is..." and handed it back to her.

And she wrote, "chopping wood so that Jesus and the disciples can have a bon fire."

I thought what an incredible resolution that was for her. She had, in effect, sentenced her grandfather to hard labor...*in heaven*. But of even more significance, she had done something I couldn't do. She had forgiven him.

(\*name changed)

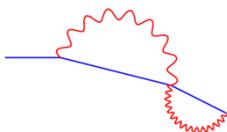
## Timeline of Teachers

List the teachers (names, events, places) that correspond with each period of age.

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<b>0-6</b> Years of age	<b>6-12</b> Years of age	<b>12-18</b> Years of age	<b>18-24</b> Years of age	<b>24-35</b> Years of age	<b>35-50</b> Years of age	<b>50+</b> Years of age
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# MEDITATION



**11:15**

Now that you have worked on the timeline, had the opportunity for faces and stories to come to mind, look back over your work. Think about each name you have written, what do you remember about that person or event? What did they teach you? What did you learn?

In your journal, make a list of all of the teachers and beside their name write the lesson you learned from them.

For instance:

1. Ms. Raeford, my kindergarten Sunday School teacher. She taught me the sacred stories.
2. My grandmother taught me kindness.
3. My mother taught me to be brave.

Choose one teacher and using a notecard, write them a letter of thanks. Let them know you are grateful for them today. Seal it up and place it on the altar. If this teacher is able to be reached, mail it when you have the opportunity. If you do not know the address or cannot send it, then simply keep it with your sacred items for a period of time.

After you have made your list and written your card, light your candle, and say this prayer:

“God of all the universe, I see now that I am not, nor have I ever been alone. I have been surrounded by a so great a cloud of witnesses. I have been encouraged and taught and loved. I have learned lessons of \_\_\_\_\_ (name some of the lessons you learned.) . I am who I am because of all of this, because of all of these. Help me to be mindful of the generosity of those willing to teach me, to show me what it means to live. Thank you for those who have taught me to love. In your mercy, help me to find ways to honor their gifts by letting them know of my appreciation and by passing on their lessons to those now looking to me for guidance, for lessons. Help me to teach what I have learned.” Amen.

*“For food in a world where many walk in hunger, for faith in a world where many walk in fear, for friends in a world where many are alone, we give you thanks, O God. Amen.”*



## **Nature and Nourishment**

**12:00**

It's lunch time and you are invited to enjoy the food you have brought for this midday meal. Find a nice place where you can be comfortable and see beauty. If you can be outside, find a place where you can hear the sounds of nature, see the sights. Pick a spot that satisfies your soul.

Also, as you prepare to enjoy this nourishment, be mindful of what you are eating. Think about all the hands involved in getting each item to you. Farmers, field workers, factory employees, truck drivers, think of how many participated in your meal and for a few minutes let your mind think of these workers in gratitude.

Eat slowly, allowing your senses to enjoy everything you have. Try to avoid eating mindlessly. Be aware of the tastes in your mouth, the smells of the food, and the point at which your stomach is full. Pay attention to everything you are doing and enjoy this quiet time.

When you are finished, enjoy a nice walk in your retreat setting.



*“It is our right to hate an evil man for his actions but because his deepest self is the image of God it is our duty to honor him with love.”*

*-Rav Kook*



## **Forging to Forgiveness**

**1:00**

Maybe you are ready for this and maybe you are not; forgiveness is an act we all know is important to our own spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being. And yet, it is much easier to talk about forgiveness than it is actually to do it. Be gentle with yourself. If there is something too big for your consideration today, somebody who has harmed you too deeply, write in your journal about the hope for yourself to move towards forgiveness but allow yourself to understand it might not happen in just one day of reflection. We do what we can do.

For this hour you are invited to work on a difficult issue. You are invited to consider both those people who have harmed you, the ones you are called upon to forgive **and** you are invited to consider the necessity of forgiving yourself. We all carry around these concerns of not being able to forgive like we are holding bags of stones. We will not find peace until we are finally able to let them go, put the bag down.

We will start with a simple worksheet, an opportunity for you to consider what event and what person or people need your forgiveness today. Work through the sentences on the following page. When you are finished, put aside the page and breathe deeply for five minutes.

## Forgiveness Worksheet

1. When I think about forgiveness I think of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
2. When I think about forgiveness I think of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
3. When I think about forgiveness I think of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
4. I realize that I have not forgiven \_\_\_\_\_
5. I realize that I have not forgiven \_\_\_\_\_
6. I realize that I have not forgiven \_\_\_\_\_
7. I realize that I have not forgiven \_\_\_\_\_
8. I wish I could forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for  
\_\_\_\_\_.
9. I wish I could forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for  
\_\_\_\_\_.
10. I wish I could forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for  
\_\_\_\_\_.
11. I wish I could forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for  
\_\_\_\_\_.
12. I wish I could forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for  
\_\_\_\_\_.

13. I would like to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for  
\_\_\_\_\_.

14. I would like to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for  
\_\_\_\_\_.

15. I would like to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for  
\_\_\_\_\_.

16. I would like to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for  
\_\_\_\_\_.

17. I would like to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for  
\_\_\_\_\_.

18. I would like to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for  
\_\_\_\_\_.

19. I need to forgive myself for \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

20. I need to forgive myself for \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

21. I need to forgive myself for \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

22. I need to forgive myself for \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.



Take five minutes to sit quietly and meditate upon the work you have completed.

## A Letter of Forgiveness



Look back over the worksheet you just completed. How was it for you to fill in those blanks? How are you feeling right now? Think about your answers. Think about who emerged for you in this activity.

Is there someone you had not expected? Is there something you had forgotten that you realize now you are still carrying around with you?

Regarding your own need for forgiveness, is there something for which you need to make amends?

In your journal, write a page about what it means for you both to forgive and to be forgiven. Write about the person or persons you know you have not yet forgiven and reflect upon what it might take for you to move to a place where you can truly forgive.

When you have finished with your journal entry, take out one of the notecards you brought with you and write a letter to a person you need to forgive. It is up to you whether or not you send it. If you want to mail it, take it with you at the end of this retreat and do so. If you do not wish to mail it or you no longer are able to contact the person who has harmed you, place the letter on your altar, leaving it there for the rest of the day. When your retreat is over, take the letter and dispose of it.

With the other notecard, write a letter to ask for forgiveness for someone to whom you wish to make amends. Following the instructions above, if you wish to mail it, do so at the end of

the retreat. If you are unable to contact the person or do not wish to send the letter to them, put the note on your altar table.

When you are finished, light a candle, think of the things you have worked on, the people you have forgiven, the things you have done that you are letting go, and then blow out the candle.

Take five minutes after this exercise for a break. Drink a glass of water or cup of tea. Go outside for a few deep breaths or read from your book of inspiration.



*“And we should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once.”*

*-Friedrich Nietzsche*



## **Music for Musing**

### **2:30**

It's time now to listen to your favorite song selections. Dance if you like, lie quiet if that feels better, take the music and go outside or stay in and find a comfortable spot to listen. Just play your favorite songs and enjoy each one of them as a meditation.

As you listen, try to remember the first time you heard the song. Think about why the song is special to you. Does it remind you of a particular time in your life? A particular person? What does the song mean to you? What does it make you feel?

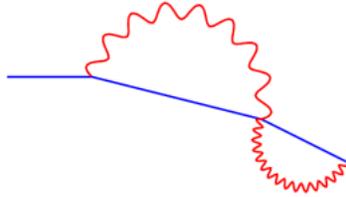
While or after listening to your music, journal about the experience of hearing these songs once more.

This part of your day is to last twenty minutes. Take the extra ten minutes to stretch.



*“In peoples’ eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved, life; this moment in June.”*

*-Virginia Woolf (from Mrs. Dalloway)*



## **A Best Day**

### **3:00**

With those songs still playing in your mind, those happy tunes still on the tip of your tongue, it's time to consider a wonderful memory. This half hour of reflection asks you to think about a best day ever. If you're like me, it's hard to think of just one. I have several. However, this is a time in the day in which you are invited to take a few minutes and look back on your life, across all those years and think about your happiest days, your most joyful or relaxing or exciting days. Were you a child? A teenager? Did those days, did that one special day happen when you were a young adult? Try to think of just one very best day. Consider, what is it about that day that made it so special?

Now, take twenty minutes and **in your journal** write about that best day, a day when you felt the most alive, the most engaged, the happiest. After completion, look over what you have written. **Circle six words or phrases** that stand out to you, the words that feel the most alive, the most descriptive of your best day. Write those words or phrases on the next page, one word/phrase per line. Follow the instructions to write a poem.

# My Best Day

Using your six circled words or phrases, write them down in any order on the numbered lines below.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

Using the numbers beside the lines above, write those lines in the spaces below:

**Write Line #1** \_\_\_\_\_

**Write Line #4** \_\_\_\_\_

**Write Line #2** \_\_\_\_\_

**Write Line #6** \_\_\_\_\_

**Write Line #4 again** \_\_\_\_\_

**Write Line #3** \_\_\_\_\_

**Write Line #2 again** \_\_\_\_\_

**Write Line #5** \_\_\_\_\_

**Write Line #1 again** \_\_\_\_\_

Using the lines from above, write it as a poem on the following page.

# *My Best Day*

*“We shall laugh again but we shall never be young again.”  
-Patrick Moynihan after the  
death of John F. Kennedy*



## **An End of Life Mandala**

**3:30**

We are moving near the end of the retreat day and it is important that you spend some time considering what is important for you at the end of your life. As I mentioned in the **Introduction**, as a hospice chaplain I discovered most people had not thought much about what they wanted at the time of their deaths. So many people were so focused on getting better or fighting the disease until the very end that there was no time or space given to contemplate what death might be like. For many, to make such considerations was thought of as giving up or negative thinking. Perhaps, that is so.

The reality is, however, that we will all die. Even in the healing stories of Jesus, those who were healed eventually died. Healing is not the same as immortality; so it only makes sense that we spend some time in consideration of what might be important for us when it is our time to die.

Of course, we will not all get to choose what our end of life experience will be. Accidental deaths, unexpected fatalities, these are part of life. And yet, many people do get a say,

do have a voice in what they want. I strongly encourage you to write a will, complete an advance directive and let your family members and your primary health practitioner know of your wishes regarding life support (ventilator), artificial feeding, and any extraordinary measures you want or do not want to be taken. Do not leave these decisions to be made by your family members. They will already be suffering enough; let them know of your wishes, have a conversation while you are able. This is one of the most loving things you can do for your family members. So, after you have enjoyed your retreat day, make that a priority. Put your wishes into writing. Have the conversation with your family and loved ones.

For this activity, you will be using the idea and form of a mandala. A **mandala** is a spiritual symbol used in many religions as a tool for establishing a sacred space and as an aid in meditation. I use it sometimes just to get clarity regarding what has become important in my life. Although there are many forms of mandalas, including squares and triangles, I like to use a circle. All you need to do on the next page is to draw a big circle. Then using your crayons or colored pencils, write or draw the elements that you would like as a part of your end of life experience.

Include everything you think would make for a most pleasant and easy transition from this life to the next. Try not to be too realistic. This is simply to help you start thinking about what elements will be important to you at the end of life. Understand that this may change over the years and perhaps this tool will be one that you come back to year after year. But for today, write or symbolize what/who you would like to be with you at the end of life.

Imagine the room in which you are transitioning. Is there music playing? What kind? Do you want certain things read to you when you are no longer able to read for yourself? Who are the people you want to be present? Are there certain smells you think you might like? Would you

like to have an altar created? What elements would be on that altar? Do you want photographs? Would you like to hear someone sing to you? While you are able, would you like religious rituals? Which ones?

Draw a circle on the next page and include everything inside of it that you think might be peaceful and comforting for you at the end of your life.

Take thirty minutes to complete this activity.



*An End of Life Mandala*

*“That it will never come again is what makes life so sweet.”  
-Emily Dickinson*



## **Before I Go**

### **4:00**

The last assignment for the day is to write an essay or poem using the phrase, Before I Go as both the first and the last phrases for your piece. Before beginning, take some time to ponder the things you would like to do before you die. Do you need to ask for forgiveness from someone? Do you need to forgive? Is there a dream you have not seen to fruition or an invitation to your spirit still waiting for a response?

In many ways this exercise is a bucket list of sorts; but instead of those great travel plans or adventure you look forward to having before you leave this world, contemplate instead on spiritual concerns, those things you would like to do that will make your life more meaningful.

I have included a few essays others have written; they follow this page. I hope you enjoy them. Let them inspire and inform you but after ten or fifteen minutes, begin writing what it is you hope to do before you go.

## *Before I Go*

*Before I Go*

*I will tidy up my shelves,  
slide my fingers along the spines of books  
standing by quietly like old friends,  
waiting in line to greet me.*

*I will wash down the wooden table  
where I have tasted delight,  
serving up plates and bowls of tenderness  
to those who came and went and  
those who stayed as guests.*

*Before I go*

*I will think of past lovers and the children I have watched play.  
The way we held hands on paths and trains,  
next to each other in bed  
the way only you and I have loved.*

*I will call out the names of all the beloved in thanksgiving  
those long gone, the new ones,  
ones whose stories I can no longer recall,  
so many who walked with me on this pilgrim's journey.*

*Before I go*

*I will unpack my guitar and  
for just a few minutes  
I will sing songs of my youth  
so I can feel once more  
music in my bones  
its clear notes of joy.*

*I will watch the sky for birds and the earth  
for fallen seeds,  
the sweet bloom of spring.  
The sun will warm my face  
as the dance of morning breezes picks up  
all that is light and uprooted,  
a swirl of leaves and feathers.*

*And I will let go of what has hurt me  
the stumbles, the throwing of stones,  
and I will unwrap my heart from the layers  
of protection, to feel what it is finally  
to forgive and to be forgiven.*

*Mercy, the companion I now welcome.  
Before I go  
Oh sure, I will cry.  
Who doesn't weep at the sharpness of goodbye?  
The knowledge of what it all means  
and doesn't mean.*

*Still, beyond the soaking tears of leaving and remembering and  
the ache of pulling away,  
I will hold open my hands and greet in peace  
this new day.*

*Because even in sadness I know  
what anyone who has ever breathed knows.*

*It was kindness that gave me birth  
Kindness that saw I lived in fullness  
no matter the number of days  
or hours lost.*

*I have seen  
this life is beautiful.  
I have recognized this place in all its  
flowering splendor  
and now in silence  
I breathe it all in,  
All of it  
easily, deeply in*

*Before I go.*

*-Lynne Hinton*

## **Before I Go**

Before I go,  
Know that love  
Is what remains  
between us  
Know this, too  
That I am grateful,  
That our presence together in this life  
Has blessed me in more ways  
than you will ever know

Before I go  
Let me tell you one more time  
That love is never lost  
That hurt, mistakes, joy  
Anger, tears, forgiveness,  
Are part of being created human  
And help us to become  
More like God, in the end  
If we will let them

Before I go  
Know that I leave in peace  
That I do not regret  
The unfinished projects  
The places I have not visited  
The things I have not done  
I trust that whatever I have done  
God has been able to use

Know, also,  
That I have loved living on this earth  
Especially I have loved its amazing creatures  
And its wild places  
If you miss me too much  
And think you cannot bear it  
Lie on the ground  
Walk in the desert  
Sit on a rock  
Listen to a stream  
Watch the bluebirds  
And know that the peace  
I have always felt with them  
Will be with you, too

Before I go  
Know that I will miss you  
But that my love is always with you  
And my spirit is still joined with you  
As it is, and always has been  
Joined with God

Sarah Kotchian

## Checklist

By Robert Nein, copyrighted 2016

Before I go, let's see--  
    have I got everything?  
Keys, phone, wallet, clean handkerchief?  
Just kidding, I'm traveling lighter this time.  
I won't need this half-finished mystery novel--  
    the library should be enormous where I'm going.  
Which, you might say, is a mystery in itself.  
Hope it's the temperate climate, never could function well  
    in extreme heat. (Little death joke, there).

Oops, I said the word.  
There are euphemisms I prefer:  
    passing away, passing over, going to rest,  
    (you see that a lot in obits, which reminds me--  
    I forgot to write mine, or at least suggest some talking points.  
Also, there's Going to Meet My Maker, and my favorite,  
    making my transition.  
That one has a nice ring of eternity to it, which  
    would trump any excuses for not finishing War and Peace.

There *is* a daunting list of incompletions,  
    though I've managed to pare it down somewhat.  
Finally got the will done,  
    my, was that a major procrastination.  
Took care of most of the good bye's, the I love you's,  
    the please-forgive-me's, the I-forgive-you's.  
The to-do list is still pretty long, though  
    if you look at the bigger picture.  
War, poverty, disease, genocide, ethnic hatred,  
    the wounded planet,...plenty to keep you busy.

Mixed emotions here, I'll admit.  
I'd like to stay longer and help you try  
    to clean the place up a little,  
    (not to mention a few more selfish aims).  
But I am excited to see the family again.  
So, anyway, be good to yourself,  
    try to eat right and exercise more  
    (though who am I to give advice?)

And what else...oh, yeah.  
You were so good to me. Please remember  
    That I will love you forever.  
That's my final request before I go.

## **Before I Go....or A Journey of a Life Time by DaVee Pullen**

I want to one more time, feel the changing of the seasons.

Spring winds caress my face, as I walk along the soggy path of my land. Visions of the dead dull carpet of flora, once more begins to erupt in tiny green forbs & swollen buds, promising to yield, one more time a pageantry of color.

Here comes the sun of summer, warming my body and causing me to cast off my clothes, once again feeling freedom & the loss of bondage of winter clothing. The heat of the sun intensity leads me to the joyous reunion of the fresh clear, cold waters of Browns Lake.

Once again, the seasons change from hot and dry to a welcoming cool breeze and cold water, and a full canopy leaves changing to vibrant yellows, oranges and reds. The sweet smell of decay, effervescence from leaves crushing under foot. May I take one more trip to the top of Quartzite Mtn. looking out over our hidden valley and feel my senses soar with the red tail hawks at eye level as I perch at the edge of the cliff. Hands clasped together, my husband and I experience the wonder of our earth.

The excitement of the winter season is here. Holiday times of faith and love of family and friends makes the crisp air sparkle. Cozy and comfortable hats, coats and blankets bring us closer together. Fire place crackling as I gaze out of the fresh white blanket of snows sends an ahh moment through my body. Our earth is once again wrapped up like a beautifully wrapped Christmas present. I am so blessed.

My seasons are numbered on the beautiful world.

It is time for me to sort, and to simplify my household.

I gaze at my things, enjoying the many of my life stories, they hold within their structures. Too many stories to tell but all have the same theme. The theme is of LOVE and of adventures. So many adventures, I have had with my mate, Owen Pullen. A candle he gave me reads, "If you wish to be loved, Love". We have loved!

Each precious moment I have on this earth, I give thanks for my children. The joy and learning they have given me, through these years of spreading their wings to soar or trod the paths of life is so immense. I give thanks for being here and able to share this time with them.

Preparing to leave can be hard. Saying, last good-byes to family and friends, is never easy. I appreciate those who have taken the time to reconnect through thought, words and deeds. I love you.

As I prepare to leave this world, I find the "nesting" response, like preparing for birth has set in. To get my home/ nest in order, I clean, repair and sort my household. All of this seems to take so

much longer as my body weakens and I take the time to reconnect with others and explore this world beyond my door step.

Planning, praying and letting go. There is more flow to my life.

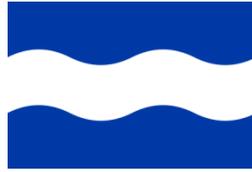
Will I, write my "Emily" stories? Will I write down and share my farm, country girl stories? I hope so. To have this connection, through stories for my children and grandchildren would be fun.

Just one more laugh, one more look of connection and experiencing that JOY! Yes, that is what I want before I go.



*“Let the beauty of what we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.”*

*-Rumi*



## **An Ending**

**5:00**

It should be late afternoon for you by now and I hope this retreat day has brought you much to think about, to celebrate, and even noted as needing to continue. It was meant to be an opportunity to reflect upon your life, your loves, your memories, as well as your hopes.

I'm sometimes asked what terminally ill people want to talk about. Of course, there is no right answer, there isn't even just one answer since those facing death are as different as any population. However, for those nearing the end and willing to embrace that time in their lives, I do find a certain openness, a certain clarity that most of us don't have. Often, there is a sense from them that they want to make things right in their relationships and they want to feel peace.

One patient I remember really was completely open to the dying process. She looked forward to the "transition," and harbored no fear or regrets about what she knew was inevitable. When I visited we talked about many things from her life, her most important relationships, her art, her hopes for her daughter, what she imagined she would find on the other side. I asked her

once what she most wanted during her last days and her reply stays with me. “Awake,” she answered. “I want to be awake.”

Indeed, we would all do well to learn from this woman and not just at the time of our deaths but for our living as well. Wouldn't it be lovely if we really stayed awake and present to the lives we have been given, to show up in our relationships, to pay attention to what is truly important?

I hope today was a day when you were fully awake and that you have been able to name what gives your life meaning and purpose. There are many things I learned from those teachers who were my patients; but one thing I will never forget. Most everyone I met who was dying did it exactly how they lived.

I encourage you to begin to live the life that brings you meaning and purpose, the life that is joyful and engaged. I encourage you to consider the end of your life and let that consideration of future events serve as a means to be in your life in the presence. That would have real value!

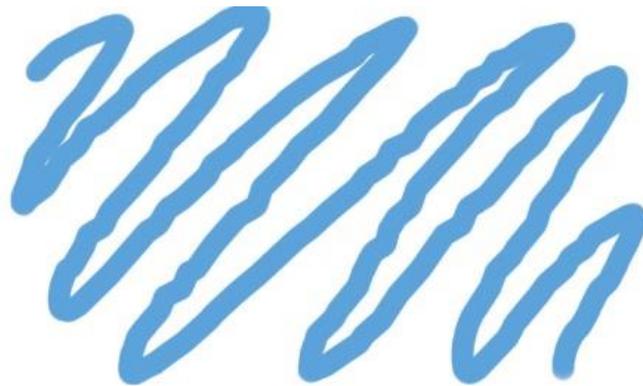
As you prepare to leave, take a few minutes to sit in silence. Light the candle on the altar. Reflect upon the day. What invitations were you given in this day of retreat? How are you feeling? Close your eyes and imagine the light of love all around you, within you. Breathe in that love and let it out for all the world. Now remember and say again the word you chose this morning to express a hope or desire for the day. Keep your eyes closed. With a deep breath in, hold it for a few seconds, and then exhale saying that word. Do this five times. Breathe in, hold the breath, exhale saying the word.

When you are finished with this meditation, blow out the candle, and then take the small bowl of water and pour it outside or on a plant. Find a way to express your gratitude for this very special day.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share this personal retreat experience with you. Blessings to you as you move from this day that has been set aside, back into your daily life. May you find what you're looking for!

Peace,

Lynne Hinton



## Final Notes

I am grateful to the Louisville Institute for the Pastoral Study Grant which allowed me the time and opportunity to work on this project. I feel very honored to have received this grant and certainly want to acknowledge their support. For more information about this study grant, check out their website at [www.louisville-institute.org](http://www.louisville-institute.org). I am also grateful for all those folks who agreed to be interviewed and who completed surveys or contributed poetry. Thank you for your assistance in making this project a reality.

About ten years ago I found a book on the sale table at a local bookstore. Its title is *Wild Heart Dancing: A Personal, One-day Quest to Liberate the Artist and Lover Within*, by Elliot Sobel. I have kept this book for a long time, using it every few years as my own personal retreat experience. This book inspired me to write the **Before I Go** retreat and if you like the format of this retreat, you will love Sobel's book. I checked and it is still in print.

The template for the Best Day Poem is adapted from an exercise created by Christine Valters Paintner from *Awakening the Creative Spirit*. It is a wonderful exercise and you can find out more about her work by checking out the book and her website: [www.abbeyofhearts.com](http://www.abbeyofhearts.com).

To learn how to write an advance directive or living will, check the website for information about the Five Wishes at [www.agingwithdignity.org](http://www.agingwithdignity.org).