

- desire: “If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew / to serve your turn long after they are gone, / and so hold on when there is nothing in you / except the Will which says to them: ‘Hold on!’...” (Rudyard Kipling, *If*)

desire: a deepening desire to enter into and develop a personal relationship with God. The importance of desire in making the Spiritual Exercises cannot be overstated. Not only must this desire be present in a person seeking to make the Exercises; it’s a grace she must continually strive to promote while making them. Don’t presume this desire. Rather, ask the retreatant: “Why do you want to make the Spiritual Exercises?” or, better yet, “What are you looking for? What is it you really want?” (John 1:38). Sebastian Moore observes that God’s creative touch frequently sparks in us a desire for “I know not what” – that is, a desire for the Mystery we call God. Since the retreatant may not be able to explain exactly what she is looking for, you need to help her express to her desires. “It is not what you are nor what you have been that God sees with his all-merciful eyes, but what you desire to be.” – *The Cloud of Unknowing* [75]

- commitment: “Do you understand what this is? ... Do you understand what you are going to be doing to yourself? Do you understand now what Picasso did? Yes, even Picasso had to do this. There is no other way. Do you understand me, Asher Lev? ... This is not a child scrawling on a wall. This is a tradition; it is a religion. You are entering a religion called painting... and I will teach you to master it.” (world-famous artist Jacob Kahn explaining to 13-year-old artist prodigy Asher Lev what he is embarking upon [Chaim Potok, *My Name is Asher Lev*, pp. 212-213])

commitment: a willingness to put aside one’s own agenda and to give the time and effort demanded of the retreat: the daily prayer, review of prayer, journaling, and examen, the weekly meeting with one’s director, and the monthly participation in the faith-sharing/processing meeting. The demands of this commitment cannot be over-stressed. The director needs to help retreatant:

1. to put aside her “devotions” (especially if they demand a great deal of time),
2. to be open to being formed by means of the various forms of prayer demanded of the Exercises, and
3. to give the time and effort demanded of the retreat: daily “hour” of prayer, review of prayer and journaling, examen, weekly meeting with one’s director, and monthly participation in the faith-sharing/processing meeting.

The commitment demanded of a person making the Spiritual Exercises in daily life is not unlike that demanded of a person who has decided to train for and run in a marathon.

- generosity and great-heartedness: “To dream the impossible dream / To fight the unbeatable foe / To bear with unbearable sorrow / To run where the brave dare not go... / And the world will be better for this / That one man, scorned and covered with scars / Still strove with his last ounce of courage / To reach the unreachable star” (“The Impossible Dream,” *Man of La Mancha*)

The need for generosity and great-heartedness cannot be overstressed. God will not be outdone by generosity and great-heartedness.

- trust in the process: “I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end... But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing... Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.” (Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*)
- a healthy image of God: “Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you” (Isaiah 49:15). Don’t presume a healthy image of God. Ask the retreatant: “Who is God for you? What is your most meaningful or favorite image of God?” Does she understand herself to be loved by God? Is God someone she can trust?

- a developing ability to enter into quiet meditative and contemplative prayer: You should help the retreatant to (1) find a quiet place for prayer and (2) develop the personal discipline to pray and grow in prayer
- a developing ability to engage one's affections in prayer: In imaginative prayer, it is important that the retreatant be an active participant in the scene and not simply an observer.
- a developing ability to make effective use of silence, solitude, inner quiet, and self-reflection: You should encourage the retreatant to develop comfort with silence: avoiding unnecessary interaction with the internet, driving home with the radio turned off, taking quiet walks near one's home, etc.
- a developing ability to engage honestly and openly with one's director: You can facilitate this by getting to know the retreatant as a person: drawing her to speak of her background, her work, her family, the people she cares about, etc.
- a developing ability to honestly assess one's life history and realistically accept one's gifts and limitations
- psychological balance and maturity: If you question this in the retreatant, seek help immediately.
- a growing awareness of one's hidden motives, urgings, interior movements, experiences of grace

Preparation Weeks

The Preparation Weeks allow the retreatant to gradually immerse herself in the retreat experience:

- to find the best time and place for her prayer,
- to develop her ability to pray, and
- to develop her ability to pray for an extended period of time.

During this time, she prayerfully immerses herself in the awareness that:

- God is most profoundly love itself and
- she is most profoundly God's beloved.

This provides a necessary foundation for all that will follow, especially as the retreatant begins to ponder her own sinfulness. Moreover, it is often among the most significant and life-changing experiences of her entire retreat.

“I have recently come to believe that God's intention for the universe, God's kingdom or rule, if you will, comes about not so much by heroic deeds of the saints, not so much by action to create a more just world, but by the willingness of each one of us to let God come close, to let God become our intimate friend. The rule of God comes about through friendship, through the love of friendship. As each one of us accepts this friendship, we are transformed. The more intimate we allow God to become, the more like God we become, or as the Greek theologians put it, the more “divinized” we become. Thus, our love becomes more universal and embraces all that God dreams for our world – a harmony of all people in a harmonious world. Such a view of things, it seems to me, locates the work of directing the Spiritual Exercises and of spiritual direction at the heart of the ministry of the church.” (William A. Barry, *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* [Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001]: 183-184)