

Abiding In God's Shadow



A Seven Day Home Retreat

David G. R. Keller

© 2013

Suggestions for Your Retreat

Abiding in God's Shadow offers opportunities to reflect on and respond to the presence of God every day of your life.

- Each day of this mini-retreat offers a different aspect of life in the “inner chamber” Jesus invites us to enter when we pray. (Matthew 5:5-6.) That realm of the heart can be anywhere. Imagine a place shielded from the blazing light of the activities in daily life. Shielded from that light, we become more aware of God’s presence. Psalm 91 calls this “nesting” in the shadow of the Almighty.
- Respond for one hour on each day’s theme. Here is a suggested pattern for each day, but try not to be attached to the specific time periods. Let each component flow into the next, yet try to both listen *and* respond.
 - ❖ Spend the first fifteen minutes listening to the words of the psalms, the New Testament, or sayings from the desert mothers and fathers quoted for each day. It may help to read the daily quotations three times, slowly and aloud.
 - ❖ Then spend thirty minutes making those words your own. You may want to rewrite them in a journal,

compose a poem, or create an artistic image.

- ❖ Spend the next ten minutes responding to what you have heard. What have these words and images called forth in me? Where do they lead? How can I follow?
- ❖ In the final five minutes offer the day's experience to God in silence and end with the Lord's Prayer.
- You may find it helpful to begin and end each hour-long "day" of the retreat with a five minute period of contemplative prayer. If you are not familiar with this type of prayer, a format is described on page 18 of this booklet. This daily contemplative prayer is an essential part of your retreat. Keep in mind that Jesus had a pattern of going off by himself to spend quiet time with his Abba.
- If you have the time, you may spend more than one hour for each "day", but be sure to do only one "day" at a time.
- The retreat may take place in your home, on a walk, in a park, or any place where you will have relative quiet, alone.
- At the end of the retreat ask yourself: What have I heard? What have I become? Where is this experience of God's presence leading me?

Day One

The beginning of living in God's shadow is the desire to be there...

Psalm 42:1-2

*As the doe gasps for little streams of water,
So pants my soul for you O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;
When shall I come and see the face of God?¹*

Psalm 91:1-4

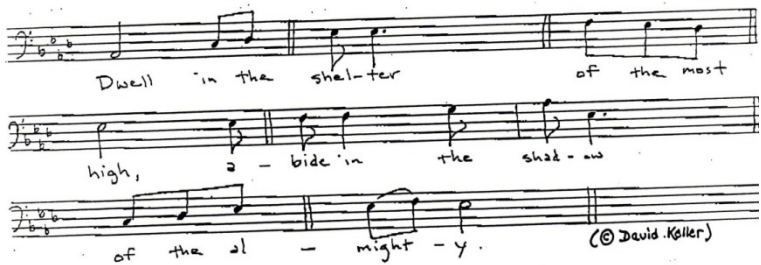
*You that sit in the shelter of the Most High,
And nest in the shadow of the Almighty,
Saying to the Lord, "My refuge and my strength,
My God in whom I put my trust" –
He shall deliver you from the fowler's trap
And from the word that would destroy.
He will cover you with his pinions,
And you will shelter under his wings.²*

Chanting a response to Psalm 91:1-4 is a good place to begin:

*"Dwell in the shelter of the Most High,
Abide in the shadow of the Almighty."*

¹ Translation adapted from John Eaton. *The Psalms*. New York: Continuum, 2005. Pages 178-80

² *Ibid.*, Page 325



Dwelling in God's shadow makes listening possible:

*"Incline your ear and come to me;
Listen, so that you may live."³*

³ Isaiah 55:3 (NRSV)

The person you become in God's shadow is the person you are called to be when you return to the sun light.

Day Two

God's Shadow Purifies our Hearts

*The word is very near you,
on your lips and in your heart.⁴*

*This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am
well pleased; listen to him!⁵*

*Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in
their hearts⁶*

As we listen to God voice, embraced by his Word, our hearts expand. The presence of the Word purifies our hearts. We begin to be cleansed of all that keeps us from God's embrace. The listening becomes a conversation as the Holy Spirit prays with

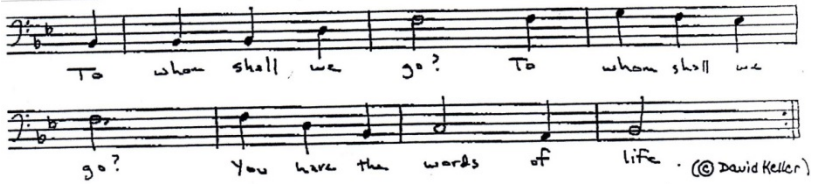
⁴ Romans 10:8 (NRSV)

⁵ Matthew 17:5 (NRSV)

⁶ Psalm 85:8 (NRSV)

and within us. Our voices become one and we can sing:

*To whom shall we go, to whom shall we go,
you have the words of life.*⁷



Listening to the Word is an experience of God. It is not an idea or wisdom about God. It is knowing God first hand through a mutual and unconditional love. *"If one loves God, one is known by God."*⁸

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will
see God."*⁹

⁷ John 6:68 (NRSV adapted)

⁸ 1 Corinthians 8:3

⁹ Matthew 5:8 (NRSV)

Day Three

God's Shadow is a Place of Waiting

Abba Antony of Egypt said, *“Whatever you find in your heart
to do in following God, that do,
and remain within yourself in Him.”*¹⁰

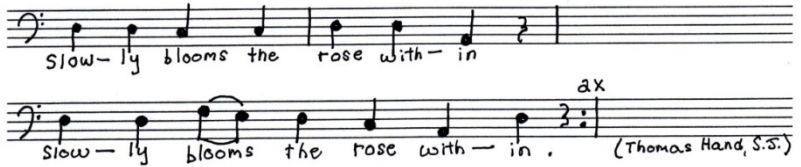
Macarius of Syria said, *“As near as the body is to the soul...so much nearer is God present,
to come and open the locked door of our heart
and to fill us with heavenly riches...
God's promises cannot deceive, provided we only
persevere to the end.”*¹¹

We live in a society of constant information and the desire for hurried, if not instant, results. But information is not knowledge and results are often not fruitful. Time has become a taskmaster and a judge of effectiveness. The flurry of information, the demands for results, and the pressure of time produce anxiety and competition. We don't like to wait or waste our time. Sadly, this is often true in the life of our faith communities and personal prayer. Our desire for spiritual formation can become an obsession for spiritual information and activity. Abba Antony and

¹⁰ Benedicta Ward, SLG, trans, *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers*. Oxford: SLG Press, 1975 Edition, XVIII

¹¹ *Intoxicated With God: The Fifty Spiritual Homilies of Macarius*. Trans, George A. Maloney, SJ. Denville: Dimension Books, 1978, page 82

Abba Macarius remind us to “remain within yourself in Him” and encourage us to “open the locked door of our heart.” They challenge us to develop a stature of waiting without control of the outcome. Slowly blooms the rose within...



Patient waiting makes the space for us to listen to God and for the Spirit of God to mentor our thoughts and actions with God’s desires for us and the world. It opens the door for a different experience of time.

Chronological time relates to the mind and body’s need to find solutions and facilitate progress. Patient waiting helps us accept our limitations and weaknesses, provides persistence in our life of prayer, and develops reliance of God.

Amma Syncletica of Alexandria said, “Eyes see only light. Ears hear only sound, but a listening heart perceives meaning.”¹²

¹² Quoted by Brother David Steindl-Rast. *A Listening Heart*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999, page 6.

Day Four

God's Shadow is the Womb of Intimacy

*Lord, you search me and know me.
You know my sitting and my rising; you discern my
thought long before.
You know my journeying and my halting, and are
acquainted with all my paths.¹³*

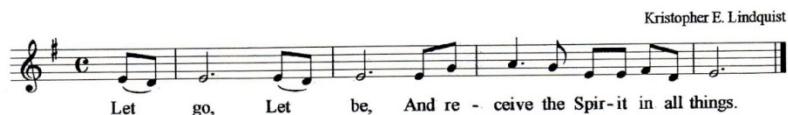
*Abide in me as I abide in you.
Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it
abides in the vine,
neither can you unless you abide in me.¹⁴*

How can human beings break the cycle of mistreating each other? The reality is that we can never do it on our own. The answer lies in placing ourselves in the mystery of intimacy. Our society craves intimacy because it is a natural and essential part of being human. It will come naturally when we patiently take time for authentic relationships to develop. Yet the valuable resources of modern technology tempt us to kidnap intimacy and replace it with instant, superficial, and virtual relationships. We can choose limitless friends and maintain complete control of these electronic relationships. Without throwing away our electronic

¹³ Psalm 139:1-3 trans. John Eaton. *The Psalms*. New York: Continuum, 2005, page 458.

¹⁴ Jesus of Nazareth in John 15:4 (NRSV)

devices, the shadow of God's presence offers a different experience. Perhaps we should let go of control of our desire for intimacy.



Text inspired by Meister Eckhart, 1260-1329 CE.
Music and text © 2001 Kristopher Erik Lindquist. All rights reserved. PO Box 43572, Tucson AZ 85733. www.newchants.com

How is this possible? Jesus gave this advice to his disciples:

*But when you pray, go into your inner chamber and shut the door
and pray to your Father who is in secret;
and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*¹⁵

What is the "reward?"

*God without your intimate love we are barren, like
seeds thrown on stones,
We are gardens without water, candles with no
flame.*

*Gather us to your breast that we might find
compassion.*

*In the quiet, hear the secret whispers of our life that
we might discover understanding.*¹⁶

¹⁵ Matthew 6:5-6 (NRSV adapted)

¹⁶ John P. Mossi, SJ. in *John P. Mossi and Suzanne Toolan. Canticles and Gathering Prayers.* Winona: Saint Mary's Press, 1989, paDay Sixge 28.

Day Five

God's Shadow is a Place of Sanctuary and Protection

*You that sit in the shelter of the Most High,
and nest in the shadow of the Almighty...
You shall not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow
that flies in the day,
the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor the plague
that destroys at noon.¹⁷*

*May he strengthen you, in his glorious might,
with ample power to meet whatever comes with
fortitude, patience, and joy;
and to give thanks to the Father who has made you fit
to share
the heritage of God's people in the realm of light.¹⁸*

God's shadow embraces every aspect of our lives, including darkness. Without the embrace of God's presence we can easily slip into our personal darkness: self-centeredness, self-interest, and self-reliance. "The plague that destroys at noon" can be our desire to create ourselves in our own image and abandon our true nature. But "the arrow that flies by day" and "the pestilence that walks in darkness" can also be sickness,

¹⁷ Translation by John Eaton in *The Psalms*. New York: Continuum, 2005. Page 325

¹⁸ St. Paul in Colossians 1:11-12

unemployment, broken relationships, and unresolved conflict. In the midst of these experiences God’s “glorious might” and “ample power” are present as well.

19

When the “ample power” is God’s and not our self-reliance, the scenery of darkness may remain, but will not define the landscape. Darkness and the blinding light at noon can limit our vision unless we are open to the possibilities of “fortitude, patience, and joy.” Joy in our darkness? Is that just “pie-in-the-sky naiveté?” Joy is not surface “feel good” stuff. It is awareness that in the midst of darkness we are not alone. St. Paul describes what living in the shadow of God’s presence is like:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.²⁰

¹⁹ Chant by Kristopher E. Lindquist. *Chants for Meditation and Celebration*. Used with permission.

²⁰ Romans 6:38-39 (NRSV)

Day Six

God's Shadow is a Place of Hope

*And so we wait for you Holy One,
our help and our shield.*

*For in you our hearts find joy; we trust in your Holy Name.
May your love be upon us, Adonai, as we place all our hope in
you. ²¹*

There are times when we feel voiceless or are made powerless. We can easily become cynical and lose hope. How can one person or a small group influence injustice? Sometimes it does not seem possible that our efforts will ever be worthwhile. At times like these it is essential to wait in the shadow of God's presence. God's help may be assurance that our time-frame for "results" is too short. God can see beyond our impatience and powerlessness. At the same time the Spirit will help our "hearts find joy" by show us that our efforts are worthwhile regardless of the outcome. This is an experience of God's love!

Refrain

Chord symbols: cmin, cmin/B \flat , A \flat , fmin, gmin7, B \flat , cmin

Lyrics: Show us the Way of com - pas - sion, — the Way of joy and peace.

22

© 2013 David Keller

²¹ Psalm 33:20-22 adapted from *The Inclusive Psalms*.

²² Chant by Kristopher Lindquist. *Chants for Meditation and Celebration*. Page 100. Used with permission.

*A hermit had persevered for thirty years. One day he said to himself, "I have now spent so many years here and I have had no vision and performed no miracles as did the Fathers who were monks before me." And he was tempted to go back to the world. Then he was told, "What miracle do you want to perform that would be more extraordinary than the patience and courage God has given you and which has allowed you to persevere for so long!"*²³

There is danger in using other people and duration of time as criteria for discerning our own spiritual maturity. It is natural to desire tangible signs of God's presence and power, but this desire can mask the constant presence of God in the little things of our lives. Patience is the author of hope and provides space to listen for God's presence when God's voice is not heard. It is tempting to think of miracles as extraordinary supernatural interventions when they are most always simple gifts of God embedded in daily life.²⁴

*As for me, I'll always have hope, and I will add to all your praises.*²⁵

²³ Quoted in: Marcel Driot. *Fathers of the Desert*. Middlegreen Slough, UK, St. Paul Publications, 1992, page 17.

²⁴ This paragraph is adapted from: David G. R. Keller. *Desert Banquet: A Year of Wisdom from the Desert Mothers and Fathers*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011. Page 131

²⁵ Psalm 74:14 from *The Inclusive Psalms*

Day Seven

In God's Shadow We See Life in a Different Way

*Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes set high;
I do not concern myself with grand things,
or matters too marvelous for me.
But I have quieted and stilled my soul, as a weaned
child upon its mother;
like a weaned child is my soul upon me.
O Israel hope in the Lord, from now and for
evermore.²⁶*

Life can move so fast that we allow it to pass us by. Speed narrows our vision and blurs our focus. And when our focus is always self-selected we miss opportunities for wonder and growth. We can consciously or unconsciously squeeze the mystery out of life and fail to see what lies within us and other people. We take charge of life.

*“It was said of Abba Isidore, priest of Scetis,
that when anyone had a brother who was sick, or
careless or irritable,
and wanted to send him away,
Isidore said, ‘Bring him here to me.’
Then he took charge of him and by his long-
suffering he cured him.”²⁷*

²⁶ Psalm 131:1-3, trans John Eaton. *The Psalms*. New York: Continuum, 2005. Page 441.

Sometimes we ask ourselves, “How could he or she possibly be acceptable to God.” Remaining in the shadow of God’s presence will help us see people in a different way and with less judgment. In God’s shadow there is room for all of us. Although Jesus was criticized for remaining in the company of persons who were deemed unworthy, unclean, sinners, and crazy, he saw them in a different light and they were healed and transformed. Jesus invites us to a new way of seeing. We, like Abba Isidore, are called to manifest that same vision and power.



“Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them
privately,

‘Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I
tell you that many prophets and kings desired to
see what you see but did not see it, and to hear
what you hear, but did not hear it.’²⁸

²⁷ Benedicata Ward, SLG. *The Saying of the Desert Fathers*.
Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975, page 96.

²⁸ Luke 10:23-24 (NRSV)

Simple Sitting: A Form of Contemplative Prayer

Find a relatively quiet place in your home, your workplace, a church, mosque or synagogue, a park or another favorite place. Find a place to sit comfortably with your back straight, but not rigid. With your eyes closed or partially open, begin breathing slowly in and out. Be conscious of your pattern of deep breathing. Let your body and your mind become as relaxed as possible. As your mind becomes relaxed you will experience many thoughts. Let them come and go. Try, as best you can, to let your mind and inner being become empty. Let your whole being be an open vessel for God's presence and voice. Avoid expectations or hoped-for outcomes. Simply be present to God. Some persons repeat a word or short phrase in their mind to help let go of distracting thoughts and bring themselves back to silence of mind. You can choose a word that has special meaning to you. Some persons repeat a name for God such as "Holy One" or a short request such as "Come Holy Spirit". Other possibilities are "Abba, Father", "Abba", "Amma Mother", or "Amma". When you have sat in silence for about 20 minutes, open your eyes, wait for a minute or two, give thanks to God and then resume activity. If you have not experienced this form of prayer before, try it for five minutes and then gradually increase the about of time.

© 2013 David Keller