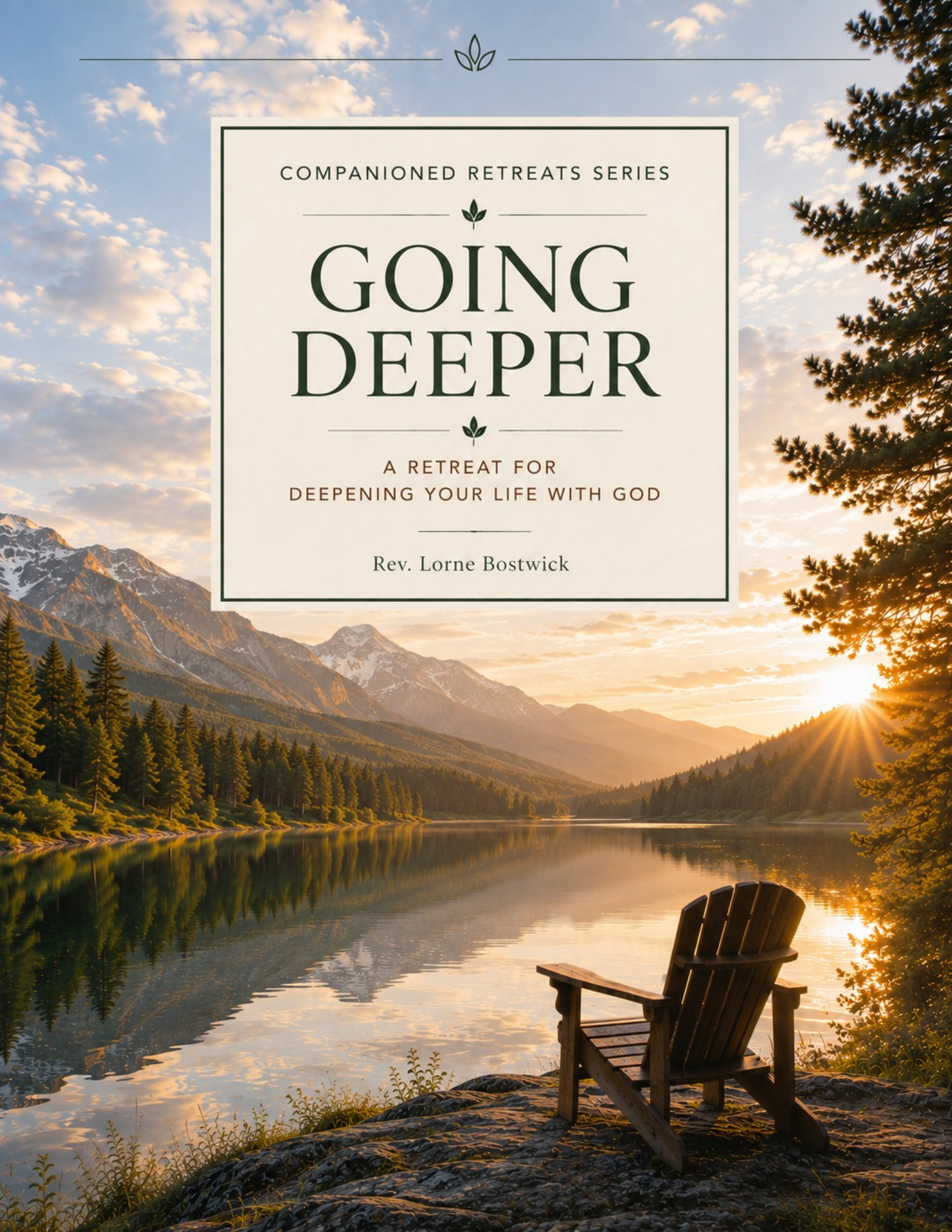
COMPANIONED RETREATS SERIES
GOING DEEPER
A RETREAT FOR
DEEPENING YOUR LIFE WITH GOD
Rev. Lorne Bostwick

GOING DEEPER

A Companioned Retreat for Deepening Your Life with God

Welcome to a Companioned Retreat

Ministry asks you to be present—to God, to people, to decisions, to worship, to conflict, to celebration, to grief, and to the ordinary work of congregational life. A retreat creates space to become present in a different way.

These Companioned Retreats are not courses to complete or subjects to master. They are invitations into experiences of prayer, Scripture, silence, movement, rest, creativity, nature, music, reflection, and delight. Each retreat is different because different seasons of life and ministry call for different kinds of attention.

The guide is a companion, not a schedule. You do not need to finish it. If an invitation leads somewhere you need to remain, remain there. If something does not fit, leave it. If you need to sleep instead of journal, sleep. If you find yourself sitting beside the water long after the guide suggests moving on, stay beside the water. **The unfinished pages will still be here. This time will not.**

Choosing a Place

Place matters. Before making a reservation, consider what will best support the retreat you are taking and what you need at this particular moment.

A retreat center, monastery, abbey, lodge, or hotel may provide meals, comfortable accommodations, worship opportunities, walking spaces, or the quiet presence of other people. Having meals prepared can remove one more responsibility from days intended for receiving.

A cabin, camp, borrowed cottage, or other private setting may offer greater solitude and freedom over the rhythm of your days. You may need to provide your own meals. For some, that is an unwanted distraction; for others, preparing bread, chopping vegetables, tending a fire, or cooking a good meal can itself become part of retreat.

Look for what matters to you: privacy, safety, comfortable sleep, access to nature, water or trails, a chapel, a fireplace, a kitchen, perhaps a piano. There is no ideal retreat setting. Choose a place that supports the experience you hope to have.

Before You Go

Arrange for someone else to carry the responsibilities that genuinely cannot wait. Decide how available you will be and how you will use—or not use—technology. Bring what the particular retreat suggests, along with whatever helps you pray, rest, move, create, or make music. A guitar, walking shoes, swimsuit, journal, favorite Bible, sketchbook, novel, or nothing extra at all may be right for you.

Most of all, you do not need to arrive rested, spiritually centered, or ready for a profound experience. **Come as you are when you get there.**

For these days, you are not responsible for making something happen.

You have made room.

Now enter it.

Going Deeper

There are seasons when your life with God feels alive and spacious. There are other seasons when it becomes familiar, hurried, dutiful, or simply crowded by everything else.

Ministry adds another complication. So much of your life with God is lived on behalf of other people.

You open Scripture and begin thinking about Sunday. You pray in hospital rooms and at meetings. You choose hymns for worship. You speak words of blessing and assurance. You listen for what God might be saying to a congregation.

All of that can be holy.

And still there is a relationship with God that belongs simply to you.

This retreat is an invitation to give that relationship some room.

There is no spiritual problem to diagnose here, no measure of whether your prayer life is adequate, no need to determine whether you are as close to God as you once were.

For these days, the invitation is much simpler:

Come and spend time with God without needing that time to become useful.

Before You Arrive

Bring a Bible you enjoy reading—not necessarily the one you ordinarily use for sermon preparation.

Bring a journal if writing helps you notice what is happening within you. There will be opportunities to use it, but much of this retreat will happen away from the page.

If you make music, consider bringing an instrument. If the place you are staying has a piano, perhaps you will find your way to it.

Bring comfortable clothes for being outdoors and moving your body in whatever ways are available and right for you.

Leave the stack of spiritual books at home.

For this retreat, one Bible is enough.

The First Evening

You Have Arrived

You are here.

That is enough for tonight.

Put your things away. Learn the place. Find where you will sleep. Discover where the coffee is made. Step outside for a few minutes and see what surrounds you.

If someone has prepared dinner, receive it.

If you are preparing your own meal, make something uncomplicated. There is no reason to create more work tonight.

You may feel peaceful.

Or restless. Distracted. Tired. Lonely. Relieved. Perhaps strangely uncertain about what to do now that nobody needs anything from you.

However you have arrived, let yourself arrive that way.

Find a Place

Sometime before the evening ends, find a place where you would like to sit.

A chapel. A porch. A chair beside a window. A bench. A dock. A patch of grass. A place beside the fire or beneath a tree.

Sit there.

No prayer technique is necessary.

Notice your breathing.

Feel your body settling after the journey.

Listen to the sounds around you.

And when you are ready, say silently or aloud:

Here I am.

Stay for a while.

Before Sleep

Read Psalm 131 slowly.

Tonight, let it be Scripture that belongs to you.

If one word or image stays behind after you have finished reading, let it stay.

Then close the Bible.

Take a shower. Sit by the fire. Make tea. Play your guitar. Listen to the quiet. Look at the stars.

Let the evening be easy.

There is nothing left to accomplish tonight.

Go to bed when you are tired.

The First Morning

Before Anyone Comes Looking for You

There is no required hour for beginning this morning.

If you wake early and want to watch the light arrive, watch it.

If your body asks for more sleep, give it more sleep.

When you rise, try not to begin the day with news, email, messages, or social media. Before discovering what has happened everywhere else, notice where you are.

Make coffee or tea if that is part of your morning. Find somewhere comfortable. Take your Bible with you.

Read Mark 1:35–39.

Jesus has gone away to a solitary place.

Eventually the disciples find him.

“Everyone is searching for you.”

You know something about this.

People need answers. Someone is sick. A decision needs to be made. Sunday is coming. Something has happened at the church. Someone wants a few minutes that become an hour.

There is almost always a reason to be found.

But for a while, Jesus was somewhere else.

Stay with the scene.

Let it be enough.

Breakfast

When you are hungry, eat.

Taste your food.

If someone has prepared it, allow yourself to be served.

If you are cooking, prepare breakfast without hurrying.

And let breakfast be breakfast.

Enjoy it.

Go Outside

Leave This Guide Here

For this part of the morning, leave the guide behind.

Go outside.

Walk if walking feels good to you. If it doesn't, find somewhere outdoors to sit, stretch, or simply remain.

Don't take a reflection question.

Don't listen to anything.

You aren't looking for a metaphor, and creation has not been assigned the task of teaching you something.

Notice what is actually there.

Light.

Temperature.

Movement.

Sound.

Color.

Texture.

Distance.

Something alive.

Something still.

Stay long enough to stop wondering what you are supposed to be noticing.

Come back when you are ready.

When You Return

Get something to drink.

Sit down.

Rest.

If words are waiting, open your journal and begin:

I noticed . . .

Write until you have said what you want to say.

Then stop.

If there are no words waiting, leave the journal closed.

Whatever happened outside can simply have happened.

Midday

Nothing Comes Next Yet

Have lunch.

Eat with others if you want company and the setting makes that possible. Eat alone if solitude is what you want.

Then leave the guide closed.

Nothing comes next yet.

Take a nap.

Swim.

Sit outside.

Stretch.

Watch something living.

Do nothing at all.

Let your body have some say in what rest means today.

Later

Without Needing Words

Sometime later in the afternoon, return to the place where you sat when you first arrived—or choose another place that draws you.

Leave your journal behind.

If you brought an instrument, take it if you like.

Begin without deciding what is supposed to happen.

If prayer comes, pray.

If words don't come, let there be no words.

If you want to sing, sing.

Pick up your guitar. Sit at the piano and see what your hands remember. Play a hymn if a hymn comes to you. Play something else if something else comes.

Music does not have to be religious for the time to belong to God.

And if music isn't yours today, listen to what is already around you.

Stay until it feels time to move.

Toward Evening

Remembering Aliveness

Bring your journal somewhere comfortable.

At the top of a page, write:

When have I felt most alive with God?

Then wait.

Let memory answer before analysis does.

Perhaps worship comes to mind.

Perhaps an ocean.

A hospital room.

A newborn.

A funeral.

A piece of music.

Communion.

A friendship.

A terrible day when somehow you knew you were not alone.

A completely ordinary afternoon.

Receive the memories as they come. Write them down without explaining why they matter.

If only one comes, stay with one.

If many come, let them gather.

When you are finished, read what you have written once.

Don't look for the lesson.

Close the journal.

The Second Evening

Let Something Be Good

Do something you enjoy tonight.

Not something that will improve you.

Something you enjoy.

Cook a meal you love or receive one someone else has prepared.

Play music.

Sit beside a fire.

Swim before dark.

Watch the sunset.

Sit on the porch.

Look at the stars.

Or go to bed early.

There is no evening reflection.

Let the day remain ungathered.

Let something simply be good.

The Second Morning

Breakfast on the Shore

Begin the morning in whatever way feels natural after yesterday.

When you are ready, read John 21:1–14.

Take your time.

A night of work.

Empty nets.

Morning.

Water.

A charcoal fire.

Bread.

Fish.

Jesus.

Breakfast.

Stay with whatever draws you.

Read the story again if you want to. Or close the Bible and remain with the part of the story that has caught your attention.

Let it have your attention without asking it to explain itself.

Then have breakfast.

An Ordinary Thing

Sometime during the morning, choose one ordinary thing that needs doing.

Make the bed.

Wash your breakfast dishes.

Take a shower.

Sweep the floor.

Make coffee.

Water a plant.

Tie your shoes.

Do it without hurrying toward whatever comes next.

Notice your hands.

Notice your body.

Notice the ordinary thing itself.

When you finish, pause.

If the words fit, say:

Thank you.

If they don't, let the pause be enough.

Then continue your day.

What Do You Love?

Later in the morning, take one question with you:

What do I love about being alive?

Not what should you love.

Not what is useful.

Not what ministry needs from you.

What do you love about being alive?

Take the question somewhere.

Sit beside water.

Walk if you want to walk.

Lie in the grass.

Take photographs if you brought a camera.

Draw.

Play music.

Or simply sit and let the question keep you company.

Give it time.

An answer is not required.

Midday

Something Good

Have something you enjoy for lunch if you can.

It doesn't need to be elaborate.

Good bread. Fruit. A favorite sandwich. Something from a local restaurant. Chocolate afterward. Excellent coffee.

Whatever is available, enjoy it.

Pleasure doesn't need an apology.

Receive something good.

The Final Afternoon

What Wants More Room?

Before you begin packing, find your journal.

Read the memories you wrote yesterday:

When have I felt most alive with God?

Remember the question you carried today:

What do I love about being alive?

Let them sit beside one another for a while.

There is no need to force a connection.

When you are ready, write one final question:

What might I want more room for?

This isn't asking what needs fixing.

It isn't the beginning of a new spiritual regimen.

There are no goals to establish before you leave.

Something may simply want more room.

Prayer.

Music.

Sleep.

Friendship.

Silence.

Scripture.

Cooking.

Beauty.

Movement.

Laughter.

Time outside.

Something you haven't named yet.

Write what comes.

Or let the page remain open and unfinished.

Before You Leave

Here I Am

Return one last time to the place where you sat when you arrived.

You don't have to compare yourself with the person who sat there two days ago.

Just be here again.

Read Romans 8:38–39.

Then put the Bible down.

Sit for a while.

Perhaps something important happened during these days. Perhaps nothing you would know how to name.

Either is all right.

You came.

You made room.

You spent time with God.

When you are ready, return to the words with which you began:

Here I am.

Then leave.

Going Home

Let the retreat come home with you without asking it immediately what it meant.

There is no feeling from these days that you need to preserve. No experience you need to reproduce. Nothing you received here needs to become another responsibility.

If something continues to ask for more room, trust that you will notice.

For now, go home.

And let these days be enough.