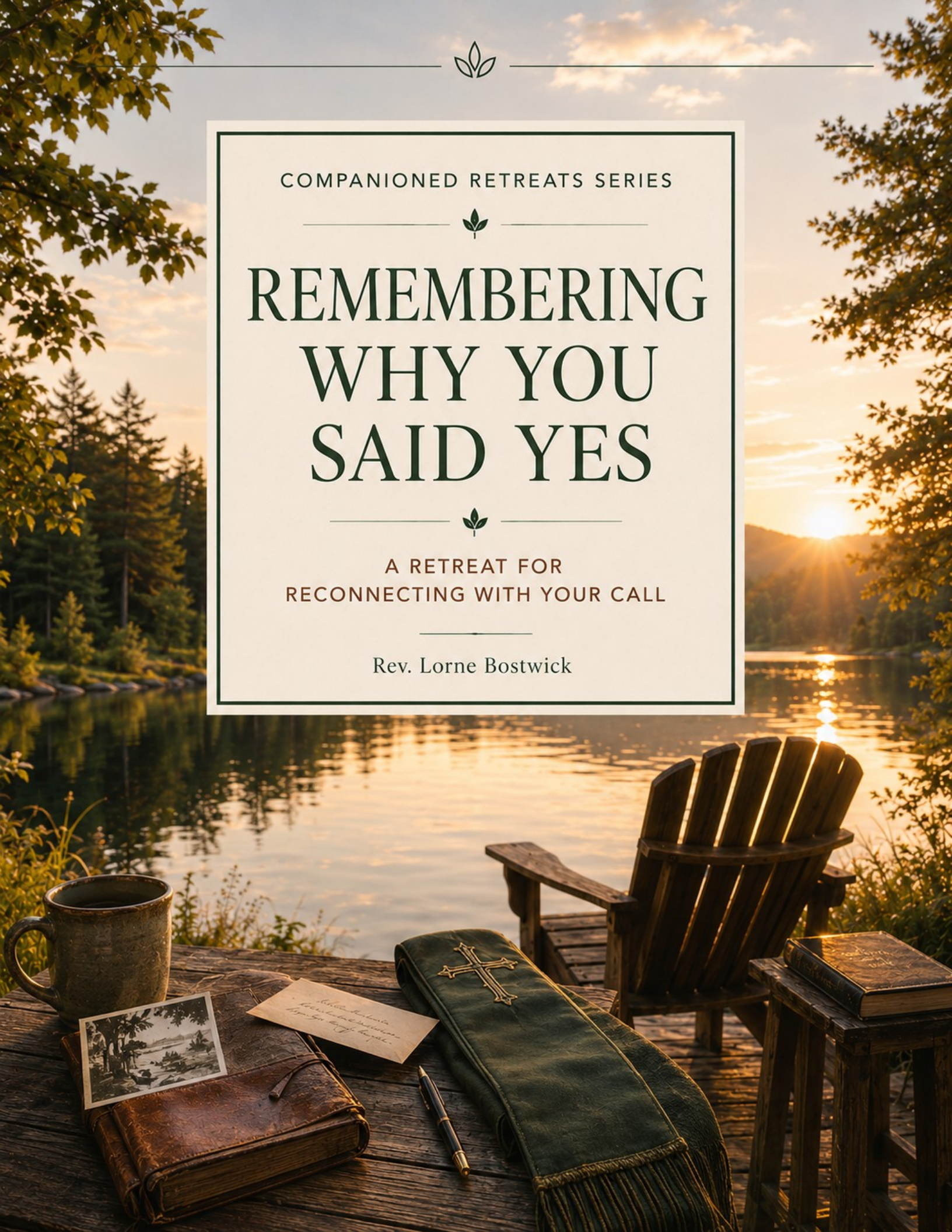

COMPANIONED RETREATS SERIES

REMEMBERING WHY YOU SAID YES

A RETREAT FOR
RECONNECTING WITH YOUR CALL

Rev. Lorne Bostwick

Remembering Why You Said Yes

A Companioned Retreat for Reconnecting with Your Call

[Insert the approved Common Introduction here.]

Remembering Why You Said Yes

There was a time before you were a pastor.

And somewhere between then and now, something happened.

Perhaps there was a moment when you knew.

Perhaps there wasn't.

Calling does not always arrive dramatically. Sometimes it begins as an idea you cannot quite dismiss. A conversation. A person who sees something in you. A community that asks something of you. A door that opens. A growing conviction. A need in the world that somehow becomes yours to answer.

Sometimes the call becomes clear only in retrospect.

And somewhere along the way, you say yes.

That yes begins a life.

Years later, it can be difficult to remember the person who first said it.

Ministry accumulates things: congregations, sermons, meetings, baptisms, funerals, conflicts, friendships, mistakes, laughter, disappointments, ordinary Sundays, extraordinary moments, people you still remember, and people whose names you have forgotten.

Eventually, vocation can become so thoroughly inhabited that you no longer remember what it felt like to approach it from the outside.

This retreat is an invitation to remember.

Not because the past was purer.

Not because you need to recover the enthusiasm of your younger self.

And not because remembering why you began will necessarily tell you what comes next.

You are simply going to spend some time with the story of your call.

Some of it may surprise you.

Before You Arrive

Bring Some of the Story With You

This retreat asks you to bring a few things.

Not everything.

You aren't moving your archives to the retreat center.

Before you leave, look through what you have kept from earlier seasons of your life and ministry.

Choose a handful of things that belong to the story of your call.

Perhaps:

A photograph.

A letter.

An old Bible.

Something from seminary.

A bulletin from an ordination or installation.

A stole.

A book that mattered then.

A photograph of a church.

Something someone gave you.

An old sermon—not because you intend to critique it.

A thank-you note from a parishioner.

An object whose significance nobody else would understand.

Don't choose only things from the beginning. Something from last year may belong beside something from thirty years ago.

Bring only what fits easily into a bag.

You may also want a journal.

And bring your Bible.

Then leave the rest of the story where it is.

The First Evening

Before the Story

Settle in.

Unpack.

Eat.

Learn the place.

Don't open the things you brought yet.

There will be time.

Tonight, remember that there was a life before ministry.

Find somewhere comfortable.

Sit for a while.

Then ask:

Who was I before I knew I would become a pastor?

Don't answer too quickly.

You may remember a child.

A teenager.

A student.

A young adult trying to imagine a future.

Perhaps you were already deeply involved in church.

Perhaps you were trying to escape it.

Perhaps ministry was the last thing you expected.

Let that earlier person come into view without asking them to explain anything.

What did you enjoy?

Who did you love?

What did you imagine your life might become?

What were you good at?

What were you afraid of?

What mattered to you?

You don't need to write any of this down tonight.

Just remember.

Before Sleep

Read 1 Samuel 3:1–10.

Samuel does not immediately recognize what is happening.

He hears his name.

He gets up.

He goes to Eli.

Only gradually does the possibility become clear:

Perhaps God is calling.

And someone else helps Samuel recognize what he is hearing.

Stay with the story for a while.

Then close the Bible.

Whatever your own call looked like, you don't need to tell its story tonight.

Go to bed.

The First Morning

The People Who Saw Something

Begin the morning slowly.

Have breakfast.

When you are ready, take your journal somewhere comfortable.

Write:

Who saw something in me before I could see it myself?

Let names come.

A parent.

A pastor.

A teacher.

A friend.

An elder.

A professor.

A colleague.

Someone who asked a question.

Someone who gave you an opportunity.

Someone who said, in one way or another:

Have you ever thought about ministry?

Perhaps nobody said those exact words.

Perhaps someone simply trusted you with something important, and you discovered yourself differently because they did.

Write the names.

Beside each one, write what you remember.

Not what they taught you.

What they **saw**.

If one person holds your attention, stay there.

You don't need to complete the list.

Later in the Morning

Take a Name With You

Choose one name from what you have written.

Take that name somewhere else.

Walk if you want to walk. Sit outside. Find a chapel. Take coffee to a porch. Sit beside the water.

Remember the person.

Their face.

Their voice.

Something they said.

Something they did.

How they entered your life.

You don't need to decide whether they were right about you.

Simply remember what it was like to be seen.

If gratitude comes, let it come.

If grief comes because that person is gone, let grief have its place too.

You may want to say their name aloud.

Then stay a little longer.

Midday

Lunch With Your Younger Self

Have lunch.

As you eat, imagine for a moment that the person you remembered last night—the person you were before ministry—has joined you.

Don't conduct an interview.

Don't explain your career.

Just share the table.

What might surprise that younger you about the life you have lived?

What might delight them?

What might make them laugh?

What would they never have predicted?

You don't need to write anything down.

Finish lunch.

The First Afternoon

Open the Bag

Now take out the things you brought.

Spread them somewhere you can see them.

Don't arrange them chronologically.

Don't make a timeline.

Pick up whatever draws you first.

Hold it.

Remember where it came from.

Let one thing lead to another.

If you brought an old sermon, don't edit it.

If you brought a photograph, don't spend too long studying everyone's hairstyle—unless that turns out to be the most enjoyable part of the afternoon.

If you brought something from seminary, remember not only what you learned there but what your life was like.

Who were your friends?

Where did you live?

What did you eat?

What were you worried about?

What made you laugh?

What did you believe ministry would be?

And if you brought a thank-you note, read it.

Don't minimize what the person said.

Don't explain away their gratitude.

Don't tell yourself you were only doing your job.

Someone experienced something in your ministry that mattered enough to put into words.

For a moment, receive what they wanted you to know.

Then return to the other things you brought.

There may be tenderness in remembering.

There may also be embarrassment.

Let your younger self have been young.

You know things now that person could not possibly have known.

That is what years are for.

Later

The Yes

Somewhere in your story, possibility became commitment.

Perhaps there was one decisive yes.

Perhaps there were many.

Yes to seminary.

Yes to examination.

Yes to ordination.

Yes to a congregation.

Yes to a difficult call.

Yes again after disappointment.

Yes when leaving would have been easier.

Yes to something you never expected ministry to ask of you.

Take your journal.

Write:

When have I said yes?

Don't limit yourself to the beginning.

Let the yeses gather.

Then notice whether one carries particular weight today.

Stay with it.

Toward Evening

Called by Name

Read Exodus 3:1–12.

Moses is doing ordinary work when something interrupts the day.

A bush.

Fire.

A voice.

His name.

“Moses, Moses!”

And Moses answers:

“Here I am.”

Don't turn the passage into a model for your call.

Your story does not need a burning bush.

Stay instead with the moment of being addressed.

Your own name has been spoken thousands of times.

By people who love you.

By people who need you.

By people who are angry with you.

By congregations.

By strangers.

By God, in ways you may or may not know how to describe.

Sit with your own name for a while.

Then let the evening come.

The First Evening

Tell Yourself a Story

After dinner, find somewhere comfortable.

If there is a fire, sit beside it.

If there are stars, go outside.

If there is music you want to make, make it.

At some point, tell yourself one story from ministry that you love.

Not the most important story.

Not the story that best demonstrates your effectiveness.

A story you simply love.

Perhaps it is funny.

Perhaps tender.

Perhaps strange.

Maybe nobody else would understand why it matters.

Remember the room.

The people.

The sounds.

What happened before.

What happened afterward.

Let yourself enjoy having been there.

You don't have to write the story down.

Then let the rest of the evening be yours.

The Second Morning

The Road Behind You

After breakfast, read Luke 24:13–35.

Two disciples are walking away from Jerusalem.

They are talking about what has happened.

Jesus joins them, although they don't recognize him.

Eventually, they begin telling the story.

Their hopes.

Their disappointment.

What they have heard.

What they cannot yet understand.

Only later do they recognize that they were not walking alone.

Take one sentence from the story with you:

“Were not our hearts burning within us?”

Then go somewhere you can be unhurried.

Looking Back

Where Was There Life?

Take your journal.

Don't attempt to review your whole ministry.

Let particular moments come.

When did something feel unmistakably alive?

A baptism.

A funeral.

A sermon.

A hospital room.

A wedding.

A session meeting that somehow became holy.

A conversation nobody else knew happened.

A child asking a question.

A person finding courage.

A congregation discovering something it could do.

A conflict that eventually became reconciliation.

A meal.

A mission project.

A ridiculous church event that went completely wrong and became wonderful anyway.

Write:

There was life when . . .

Complete the sentence as memories come.

Don't explain them.

Let them gather.

When you are finished, read them slowly.

Notice whether one makes you smile.

Late Morning

Someone You Remember

Now let one person come to mind.

Not necessarily the person whose life you changed.

That is a dangerous standard for remembering ministry.

Think instead of someone whose life became entangled with yours for a while.

Someone you were privileged to know because you said yes to this vocation.

Remember them.

What did they give you?

Perhaps they taught you something.

Perhaps they trusted you.

Perhaps they irritated you into becoming wiser.

Perhaps they loved you.

Perhaps you loved them.

Perhaps you simply shared part of the road.

Say their name if you can.

Give thanks for them.

Midday

Eat Something Good

Have lunch.

There is no reflection question.

You have remembered enough for the morning.

Eat something good.

The Final Afternoon

The Person Who Says Yes Now

Take out the things you brought one more time.

Look at them.

They belong to you.

But they do not contain your call.

They are witnesses to a story that is still being lived.

Look again at the names you wrote yesterday.

Look at the yeses.

Look at the places where you wrote:

There was life when . . .

Don't try to summarize what they mean.

Instead, ask:

What do I recognize now that I could not have recognized then?

Give the question some time.

Perhaps your understanding of call has changed.

Perhaps some things you once thought essential no longer are.

Perhaps you can see gifts you did not know you possessed.

Perhaps you recognize people without whom your story would have been entirely different.

Your call may have become quieter.

Or deeper.

Or less certain and more trustworthy.

Or simply different.

There is no correct discovery.

You are not trying to recover the person who first said yes.

That person brought you this far.

But that person could not have lived the ministry you have lived.

Only you could do that.

Before You Leave

Here I Am

Read Isaiah 6:1–8.

You know where the story is going.

Try not to hurry there.

Stay with the temple.

The smoke.

The holiness.

Isaiah's awareness of himself.

The coal.

The grace that comes before the question.

Only then:

“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

And the answer:

“Here am I; send me!”

Perhaps those words fit you today.

Perhaps they don't.

You don't have to manufacture another yes before leaving this retreat.

Your vocation is not renewed by emotional reenactment.

So don't try to feel what you felt years ago.

Instead, remember the life that followed.

The people.

The places.

The grace.

The mistakes.

The laughter.

The losses.

The ordinary Sundays.

The things you never expected.

The life that came from saying yes.

Sit quietly.

Then say only what is true today.

Perhaps:

Here I am.

That is enough.

Going Home

You came here to remember why you said yes.

You may leave with an answer.

You may leave with stories instead.

Stories may be better.

Calling is rarely one thing that happened long ago. It is a life that takes shape through thousands of responses—some courageous, some uncertain, some joyful, some costly, and many so ordinary that you did not recognize them as responses at all.

You don't need to recover your first call.

You have been living it.

And the person returning home is not the person who first said yes.

You carry more now.

More names.

More places.

More stories.

More grief.

More laughter.

More knowledge of yourself.

More knowledge of grace.

Let all of that belong to your call too.

Then return to the life that is yours.

The road behind you does not tell you everything about the road ahead.

But sometimes it is good to turn around for a moment and see how far you have come.