

Begin a New Life

Full Description/Leader Guide for a Weekend Retreat

Goals

The main goals of a *BNL Weekend Retreat* are as follows:

1. Rest.
2. Relaxation.
3. Connection with God and people.
4. A chance to go through one full experience of the *BNL* process.
5. At least one chance to share and discuss your experience with others.

Location, meals, & cost

A *BNL Weekend Retreat* happens in a donated or rented space, facility, or vacation spot. Attendees divide up responsibilities for food purchasing and meal preparation ahead of time. Alternatively, the weekend is catered. All costs are shared by the attendees.

Prayer/devotional times

The weekend is interspersed with times of prayer and spiritual devotion. These happen on Saturday morning prior to the main session, Saturday evening, and Sunday morning (more on this below).

Friday evening: Arrival, dinner, & free time

Attendees arrive on Friday evening or no later than 9:00 AM Saturday morning—the start time of the main session). People arriving on Friday evening have dinner en route, or they go out for dinner as a group after they arrive. The remainder of Friday evening is free time for socializing and settling in.

Saturday breakfast

Attendees wake for Saturday morning breakfast. They gather at 9:00 AM for the morning's events.

Welcome & Check-in

The morning opens at 9:00 AM with *Welcome* and *Check-in*. *Check-in* is a time for hearing from each member of the group. People state their name and share one highlight from their day or week or an opening comment (*one* of these things, not both). *Check-in* gives each person a chance to start actively engaging in the morning's activities. People who prefer to listen and not speak may "pass" on their turn. If the group is larger than eight people, consider breaking into groups of four to eight.

The key to *Check-in* is keeping it brief. Each person says just one, two, or a few sentences. There is typically no cross talk or conversation during *Check-in* (though this can be at the discretion of the group leader). The leader and other attendees acknowledge each person's contribution with the words "Thank you" before moving on to the next person. The total time of *Welcome* and *Check-in* doesn't exceed fifteen minutes. It ends by 9:15 AM.

Opening Prayer/Devotional Time

Following *Welcome* and *Check-in* is *Opening Prayer/Devotional Time*. It may include any of the following (or other) at the group's discretion:

1. An opening piece of music (played or performed) or an opening song sung by the attendees.
2. A spontaneous prayer offered by the group leader, an attendee, or several people creating an "additive" prayer. (An additive prayer is one in which each person adds a sentence or two to what others have said before them, and it ends when the group leader says "Amen.")
3. A reading or story from the Bible or other source of divine inspiration.
4. Two questions related to the reading (each person answers both questions):
 - a. Question #1: What part of the reading stood out to you?
 - b. Question #2: What does that part teach you for your life?
 - c. Note: If the group is larger than eight, consider breaking into groups of four to answer the questions. When the groups are finished, come back together as a whole group. Invite three people to share their answers with the entire group.
5. A closing prayer offered by the group leader, an attendee, or several people creating an additive prayer.
6. A closing piece of music (played or performed) or a closing song sung by the attendees.

Opening Prayer/Devotional Time ends by 9:30 or 9:45 AM.

Main session: The BNL process

Following *Opening Prayer/Devotional Time* is a brief overview of the morning (as described in this and the next four paragraphs). Afterward, attendees go off to private locations within the facility or outdoors. Each person uses a "Full" set of BNL worksheets to go through the entire BNL process for one particular issue in his or her life. People who are new to the process remain behind for a brief overview of the process. Afterward, they go off to private locations to practice. Attendees take snack food with them, or they break for snack food at their leisure during the main session. The session runs for up to two hours, ending by 11:30 AM.

Sharing & discussion

At 11:30 the group gathers for *Sharing & Discussion*. People take turns sharing their experience of the process. If the group is larger than eight, consider breaking into groups of four to eight. After everyone's had a chance to share, the floor is open for whole group discussion. *Sharing & Discussion* lasts up to forty-five minutes, ending by 12:15 PM.

Closing comments

Following *Sharing & Discussion* is *Closing Comments*. *Closing Comments* is a time for hearing a final, brief comment from each attendee. It allows people to remain actively engaged to the end and "check out" of the main session. People who prefer to listen and not speak may "pass" when it's their turn. If the group is larger than eight people, consider breaking into groups of four to eight.

Closing Comments happens fairly quickly, with each person saying just one or two sentences. There's no cross talk or conversation during *Closing Comments*. The group leader (and other attendees) acknowledge each person's contribution with the words, "Thank you," before moving on to the next person. The total time for *Closing Comments* doesn't exceed 10 minutes. It ends by 12:25 PM.

The Lord's Prayer

Following *Closing Comments* is *The Lord's Prayer*. Attendees stand, hold hands, and say the prayer together. Those who prefer to listen may do so. The entire morning ends at 12:30 PM.

Saturday lunch & afternoon

Saturday lunch happens any time after 12:30. It is followed by afternoon free time. Free time is a chance for people to rest, relax, go for a walk, connect with one another socially, exercise, etc.

Saturday afternoon Hors d'Oeuvres, Social Time, and Sharing & Discussion

At 5:00 PM attendees gather for *Hors d'Oeuvres* and *Social Time*. *Social Time* segues into *Check-in*, then *Sharing & Discussion*. *Sharing & Discussion* focuses on a particular theme that may have emerged during the Saturday morning sharing, a particular step in the *BNL* process, or any other topic decided on by the group. (One available resource is *90 Topics for Sharing and Discussion* on the *Start or Join a Support Group* page of the *BNL* website.) Each person shares his or her personal experience of the theme, step, or topic at hand. After everyone's had a chance to share, the floor is open for whole group discussion. *Sharing & Discussion* ends no later than 5:45 PM. It is followed by *Closing Comments*. The entire session ends by 6:00 PM. (Note: These ending times are suggestions. Groups that want extend their time together may do so.)

Saturday dinner & free time

Saturday dinner happens any time after 6:00 PM. It is followed by free time.

Saturday evening Vesper Service

Saturday evening ends with a *Vesper Service* and *Communion with God*. These things happen in a comfortable, dimly lit environment with candles or other forms of mood lighting.

The *Vesper Service* begins at 9:00 PM. It happens in a way similar to Saturday morning prayer/devotional time. It includes any of the following (or other) at the group's discretion:

1. An opening piece of music (played or performed) or an opening song sung by the attendees.
2. A spontaneous prayer offered by the group leader, an attendee, or several people creating an additive prayer.
3. A reading or story from the Bible or other source of divine inspiration.
4. Two questions related to the reading (each person answers both questions):
 - a. Question #1: What part of the reading stood out to you?
 - b. Question #2: What does that part teach you for your life?

- c. Note: If the group is larger than eight, consider breaking into groups of four to answer the questions. When the groups are finished, come back together as a whole group. Invite three people to share their answers with the entire group.

Saturday evening Communion with God

1. The vesper service segues into *Communion with God*. The *Communion with God* ritual includes the following features, some of which are optional:
2. (Note: The group leader can use the following list to prepare for the ritual in advance of the retreat, and also to instruct people in what will happen during this part of the evening.)
 - a. The group leader will take part in the ritual along with everyone else.
 - b. There will be an opening reading which describes the ritual and the positive effects it can have.
 - c. There will be a reading from the Bible—an account of the first communion of its kind.
 - d. Everyone will be invited to kneel for the duration of the communion.
 - 1) Those who can't kneel for the entire time will remain seated.
 - e. An opening prayer will be offered by the group leader, an attendee, or several people creating an additive prayer.
 - f. The attendees will receive the communion bread, then the wine and/or its alternative, from the group leader, and pass them from person to person. Each person will eat and drink.
 - 1) Note: Some groups will prefer to use *leavened* bread and/or a non alcoholic alternative to wine. If both wine and a non alcoholic alternative are used, they will be passed together.
 - 2) Note: A simple recipe for making unleavened bread is included at the end of this document.
 - g. A closing prayer will be offered by the group leader, an attendee, or several people creating an additive prayer.
 - h. The group leader and attendees will say *Lord's Prayer* together.
 - i. Those who have been kneeling will rise and take their seats.
 - j. There will be a closing piece of music, played or performed, or a closing song sung by the attendees.
3. Opening reading
 - a. The group leader does the following aloud, as a reminder of what the ritual is about and the positive effects it can have:

“Holy Communion” is a unique, symbolic ritual of life change and spiritual transformation. It invites you to come before the Lord as the author of life and source of love, and to present yourself for entrance into a new and heavenly state of heart, mind, and life. It's a time for humbly submitting yourself to the Lord—putting your heart in his hands, committing your way to his purposes, and opening up your life as a temple in which he may dwell.

The ritual of Holy Communion includes eating unleavened bread and drinking a bit of wine. (Note: Some faith traditions use *leavened* bread and/or non alcoholic alternatives to wine.) The bread and wine are elements from nature, which correspond to goodness and truth from the Lord. Because of

this correspondence, eating the bread and drinking the wine are powerful symbols for taking these spiritual realities into your life, absorbing them into your being, and making them your own—as you actively abstain from sin, begin a new life, and live it. In addition, the breakdown and function of the bread and wine in your body serve as an actual, physiological foundation on which the Lord’s inflowing goodness and truth rest. When all of these things happen together, they allow you to enjoy a complete and perfect connection with the Lord—soul, mind, and body. This in turn seals and strengthens the spiritual realities of love and faithfulness within you, as you go forward from this communion and continue living these steps of life change. You are not alone in this process. The Lord is with you, and the Lord will be in you.

4. Reading from the Bible

- a. The group leader reads the following aloud—an account of the first communion of its kind:

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples said to Him, “Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?” And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, “Go into the city, and a person will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. And wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says, “Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?”’ Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us.” So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover. In the evening He came with the twelve. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.” (Mark 14:12-17, 22-24)

5. Communion ritual

- a. The ritual for communing with God now takes place. It includes the following features, some of which are optional:
- b. Everyone is invited to kneel (for the duration of the communion).
1) Those who can’t kneel for the entire time remain seated.
- c. An opening prayer is offered by the group leader, an attendee, or several people creating an additive prayer.
- d. People receive the communion bread, then the wine and/or its alternative, from the group leader, and pass them from person to person. Each person eats and drinks.
- e. A closing prayer is offered by the group leader, an attendee, or several people creating an additive prayer.
- f. Everyone says *Lord’s Prayer* together.
- g. Those who have been kneeling rise and take their seats.
- h. A closing piece of music is played or performed, or the attendees sing a closing song.

Sunday breakfast

Attendees wake for Sunday morning breakfast. They gather for *Prayer/Devotional Time* at 9:00 AM.

Sunday Prayer/Devotional Time

Sunday morning *Prayer/Devotional Time* begins at 9:00 AM. It happens in the same way as it did Saturday morning. It may include any of the following (or other) at the group's discretion:

1. An opening piece of music (played or performed) or an opening song sung by the attendees.
2. A spontaneous prayer offered by the group leader, an attendee, or several people creating an additive prayer.
3. A reading or story from the Bible or other source of divine inspiration.
4. Two questions related to the reading (each person answers both questions):
 - a. Question #1: What part of the reading stood out to you?
 - b. Question #2: What does that part teach you for your life?
 - c. Note: If the group is larger than eight, consider breaking into groups of four to answer the questions. When the groups are finished, come back together as a whole group. Invite three people to share their answers with the entire group.
5. A closing prayer offered by the group leader, an attendee, or several people creating an additive prayer.
6. A closing piece of music (played or performed) or a closing song sung by the attendees.

Closing comments

Closing Comments is a time for hearing a final, brief comment from each of the weekend attendees. It allows people to remain actively engaged to the end and "check out" of the weekend. People who prefer to listen and not speak may "pass" when it's their turn. If the group is larger than eight people, consider breaking into groups of four to eight.

Closing Comments happens fairly quickly, with each person saying just one or two sentences. There's no cross talk or conversation during *Closing Comments*. The group leader and other attendees acknowledge each person's contribution with the words, "Thank you," before moving on to the next person. The total time for *Closing Comments* doesn't exceed 10 minutes.

The Lord's Prayer

The weekend ends with *The Lord's Prayer*. Attendees stand, hold hands, and say the prayer together. Those who prefer to listen may do so.

Lunch & departure

Following the above activities, attendees prepare for departure, eat leftovers for lunch, and depart for home.

Unleavened Bread

Recipe

- 1 cup unbleached, sifted flour
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 5 teaspoons water

Mix thoroughly to form non-sticky dough for rolling. (Note: If the dough is too dry and doesn't hold together, add tiny amounts of water until it does. Too *much* water will make the final product dense and hard.)

Roll between wax paper (to 3/16-inch thickness) and cut in circles using a water or wine glass like a cookie cutter.

Bake at 350° F for 18 to 20 minutes until golden.