

Begin a New Life

Description of a Weekend Retreat

Goals

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

- Rest.
- Relaxation.
- Connection with God and people.
- An opportunity to go through one full experience of the *BNL* process.
- At least one opportunity to share and discuss your experience with others.

Location, meals, & cost

A *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 can be catered. All costs are shared by the group.

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.

Friday evening: Arrival, dinner, & free time

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

Saturday breakfast

Attendees wake for breakfast on Saturday morning. They gather at 9:00 a.m. for the morning's events. Relaxing music can be played as people arrive.

Welcome & Check-in

The morning opens at 9:00 a.m. with *Welcome* and *Check-in*. *Check-in* is a time for hearing from each member of the group. People share one highlight from their day or week, one thing they had to leave behind in order to come on the weekend, an experience they had while traveling, an opening thought, or a hope for the weekend (*one* of these things, not all of them). *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 leader. The group leader (and others in the group) acknowledge each person's contribution with the words "Thank you" before mov-

ing on to the next person. The total time of *Welcome* and *Check-in* doesn't exceed fifteen minutes. It ends by 9:15 a.m.

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:

- An opening piece of music is played or performed, or an opening song is sung by the attendees.
- An opening prayer is offered by a group member or facilitator, or by different members of the group taking turns.
- A reading or story from the Bible or other source of divine inspiration.
- Two questions related to the reading (each person takes a turn answering both questions):
 - Question #1: What part of the reading stood out to you?
 - Question #2: What does that part teach you for your life?
 - Note: If the group is larger than eight, consider breaking into groups of four to answer these questions. When the groups are finished, come back together as a whole group. Invite three people to share their answers with the entire group.
- A closing prayer is offered by a group member or facilitator, or by different members of the group taking turns.
- An closing piece of music is played or performed, or a closing song is sung by the attendees.

Opening Prayer/Devotional Time ends by 9:45 a.m.

Main session: The BNL process

Following *Opening Prayer/Devotional Time* is a brief introduction to the morning. 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 process for one particular issue in his or her life. People who are new to the process remain behind for a brief overview. Afterward, they go off to private locations to practice. Attendees take snack food with them, or they break for snacks at their leisure during the main session. The session runs for up to two hours, ending by 11:30 a.m.

Sharing & Discussion

At 11:30 the group gathers for *Sharing & Discussion*. People take turns sharing one or two highlights from 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 p.m.

Closing Thoughts

Following *Sharing & Discussion* is *Closing Thoughts*. *Closing Thoughts* is a time for hearing a final, brief thought from each member of the group. It allows people to remain actively engaged to the end of the morning and to "check out" of the main session. 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.

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

The Lord's Prayer

Following *Closing Thoughts* 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 p.m.

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, exercise, etc.

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

At 5:00 p.m. the group gathers 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 Saturday morning, a particular step of the *BNL* process, or any other topic decided on by the group. (One available resource is *90 Topics for Sharing and Discussion* on the *Ongoing 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 6:15 p.m. It is followed by *Closing Thoughts*. The entire session ends by 6:30 p.m.

Saturday dinner & free time

Saturday dinner happens any time after 6:30. It is followed by free time.

Saturday evening Vesper Service & Communion with God

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 p.m. 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:

- An opening piece of music is played or performed, or an opening song is sung by the attendees.
- An opening prayer is offered by a group member or facilitator, or by different members of the group taking turns.
- A reading or story from the Bible or other source of divine inspiration.
- Two questions related to the reading (each person takes a turn answering both questions):
 - Question #1: What part of the reading stood out to you?
 - Question #2: What does that part teach you for your life?

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

The *Vesper Service* segues into *Communion with God* (see the Step 4.4 worksheet for a description of this communion). The communion happens in a way that is meaningful to the group. It includes the following, with some items being optional:

- Attendees kneel (for the duration of the communion).
 - *Note: Those who can't kneel for the entire time remain seated.*
- A prayer appropriate to communion with God is offered by a group member or facilitator, or by different members of the group taking turns.
- People pass unleavened bread* from person to person, then wine. Each person eats and drinks.
 - *Note: People for whom the drinking of wine may compromise their health, well-being, and/or usefulness may drink water instead—a correspondent approximation to wine. Either that or another correspondent alternative.*
- A closing prayer is offered by a group member or facilitator, or by different members of the group taking turns.
- The *Lord's Prayer* is said by the attendees (still kneeling).
- Attendees take their seats.
- An closing piece of music is played or performed, or a closing song is sung by the attendees.

Sunday breakfast

Attendees wake for breakfast on Sunday morning. They gather for *Prayer/Devotional Time* at 9:00 a.m. Relaxing music can be played as people arrive.

Sunday Prayer/Devotional Time

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

- An opening piece of music is played or performed, or an opening song is sung by the attendees.
- An opening prayer is offered by a group member or facilitator, or by different members of the group taking turns.
- A reading or story from the Bible or other source of divine inspiration.
- Two questions related to the reading (each person takes a turn answering both questions):
 - Question #1: What part of the reading stood out to you?
 - Question #2: What does that part teach you for your life?
 - Note: If the group is larger than eight, consider breaking into groups of four to answer these questions. When the groups are finished, come back together as a whole group. Invite three people to share their answers with the entire group.
- A closing prayer is offered by a group member or facilitator, or by different members of the group taking turns.

- A closing piece of music is played or performed, or a closing song is sung by the attendees.

Closing Thoughts and The Lord's Prayer

The entire weekend ends with *Closing Thoughts* and *The Lord's Prayer*. Attendees stand for the prayer, hold hands, and say it 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.

Cont.

*Unleavened Bread

BNL Communion with God includes (among other things) eating unleavened bread. Here is a simple recipe for making unleavened bread:

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

Mix thoroughly to form a 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.