

**CONTEMPLATIVE**

**BROTHERS**

**RETREAT**

**A PREPARATION GUIDE**

Contemplative Retreat for Black Leaders • July 13–17, 2026

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

*He makes me lie down in green pastures;*

*He leads me beside still waters.*

*He restores my soul.*

*— Psalm 23:1–3a*

# WELCOME

---

This upcoming retreat is a space for brothers to enjoy their freedom in Christ together, and to dare to be known and to know one another through play, conversation, and communion. For our time together this year, Psalm 23 will be our guide as we rest, descend, receive, and are sent.

This guide is a resource for getting prepared. It is intended to get your mind, body, and soul aligned and oriented to our time together, so that when you walk through the door you are not still arriving, but already on the way.

A few notes on how to hold what follows. Everything here is recommended, not mandatory. Some of these practices will feel easy to engage and others less so; give each an honest exploration, but in the spirit of freedom, engage as you can. And if you already have practices of your own that help you prepare for a time like this, you have full freedom to bring them alongside or in place of what is offered here.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

We will move through Psalm 23 under the guidance of our Good Shepherd. To green pastures. Through still waters. Down into the valley. To a table prepared in the presence of enemies. And finally, out into a life followed by goodness and mercy. The hope is that our destination will be a deeper sense of self and an experience of peace, grace, and the love of the Lord.

This is a space for Black men to be genuinely, bodily, spiritually free. It is a space where what is most true in you is not just permitted but expected, and where the work of the days is simply to be present to God, to yourself, and to one another.

Each day follows a deliberate rhythm. The morning begins with a contemplative centering, a short guided time of stillness that asks nothing of you but your presence. This is followed by personal reflection, where you sit alone with a few questions and let whatever is there surface without pressure. Twice each day the group reconvenes for a facilitated session, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Between the two, the afternoon is yours entirely: rest, the pool, a walk, a cigar, whatever helps you breathe. And each evening we gather for brotherhood, unhurried time together around good food, good conversation, and the simple pleasure of being men without an agenda.

Every session is built around a central question, not one to be answered correctly but one to be sat with honestly. A short reflection from Psalm 23 grounds us, then the floor opens for whatever is real. Each session closes in prayer, in a form suited to what was carried that day.

## HOW TO PREPARE

Beyond the essentials for a time away of rest and relaxation, the only thing you are required to bring is your truest self, as best you can locate him. You do not need to arrive having figured anything out. You do not need to have answers to the questions that will be asked. You do not need to be in a particular spiritual state or to be holding anything together. You simply need to show up as your honest, unadorned self. And if even that feels impossible or opaque, then come admitting as much and you will be welcomed.

# PRACTICES TO TRY BEFORE YOU COME

These practices are designed to foster self-awareness, God-awareness, and to orient your whole self for our time together. The more you engage the richer your retreat experience will become.

## Practice 1: Engage the Psalm

In the days before you arrive, read Psalm 23 in the English Standard Version once a day. When you finish, write down or record one thing: a word that caught you, a line that landed differently than before, a question that surfaced, a feeling that moved through.

You can keep a written journal for this, or use a voice memo on your phone if writing feels like work. Showing up to the same text more than once, and noticing what changes in the Psalm and in you, is the whole of it.

### PSALM 23 (ESV)

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

## Practice 2: Sit in Silence

*“The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek.”*

*Parker Palmer*

Once a day, sit in silence for one to five minutes. Silence here is less about being quiet, and more about letting the noise of your interior and exterior world begin to fade so something underneath can surface.

### If Silence Is New to You

If sitting in stillness is unfamiliar, build toward it gradually. If you already have a practice, simply pick up where you are.

- One minute, with soft instrumental music and eyes closed.
- Up to five minutes, still with music.
- Four minutes of soft music, then one minute of complete silence. Decrease music each day.
- Five minutes of complete silence.

If the outside quiets easily but your mind will not settle, that is worth giving attention. The thoughts that keep intruding are usually not distractions but voices asking to be heard. When one keeps surfacing, write it down (not on your phone), say it aloud, and promise yourself you will come back to it. That small act of acknowledgment is often enough to let it rest.

### **Practice 3: A Question to Carry**

In the days before you arrive, carry this question with you loosely, not to answer it but simply to notice what stirs:

*“What would it feel like to be truly free for four days?”*

Let it surface in the car, in the moments before sleep, in the quiet before the day begins. Let the question breathe, and let whatever answers come.

### **Practice 4: A Body Check-In**

Many of us have learned to live almost entirely from the neck up, thinking, analyzing, producing, managing, while the rest of the body runs silently in the background, carrying whatever we haven't gotten around to feeling. This practice is one of awareness. It doesn't require emotional fluency, just honest observation.

Once a day before you come, pause for sixty seconds and ask your body a few direct questions:

- Where is there any pain, tightness, or holding in my body right now?
- How deep does my breath feel? Can I take a full breath, or does something stop it partway?
- Where do I feel tension? In my jaw, my neck, my shoulders, my chest, my gut?
- Is there anywhere I feel loose, easy, or at rest?

You don't need to interpret what you find or translate it into feelings. Just notice the physical data and give your body its fair say in understanding how you're doing.

# **PACKING LIST**

---

## **WHAT TO BRING**

Your honest self, first. Beyond that:

- A journal or notebook you enjoy writing in
- Comfortable clothes for being outside, poolside, and at rest
- Something that helps you be still (music you love, a book, etc.)
- Something that helps you have fun (cards, cigars, etc.)

## **WHAT TO LEAVE AT HOME**

- The need to have answers
- The pressure to be further along than you are
- The habit of performing for the room
- Your to-do list (it will still be there when you return)

# **A BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY**

---

*"No matter how obsessed you've been with your own vanishing, there will always be someone who still wants you whole."*

*Hanif Abdurragib*

What you are about to enter is a space where that truth gets to show itself: in your body, among your brothers, in the presence of a God who has been watching over you and setting the space.

*Come and see.*