

Women's Ministry Toolbox

**SAMPLE
EVERYTHING
You Need to
Know About
Planning a
Retreat**

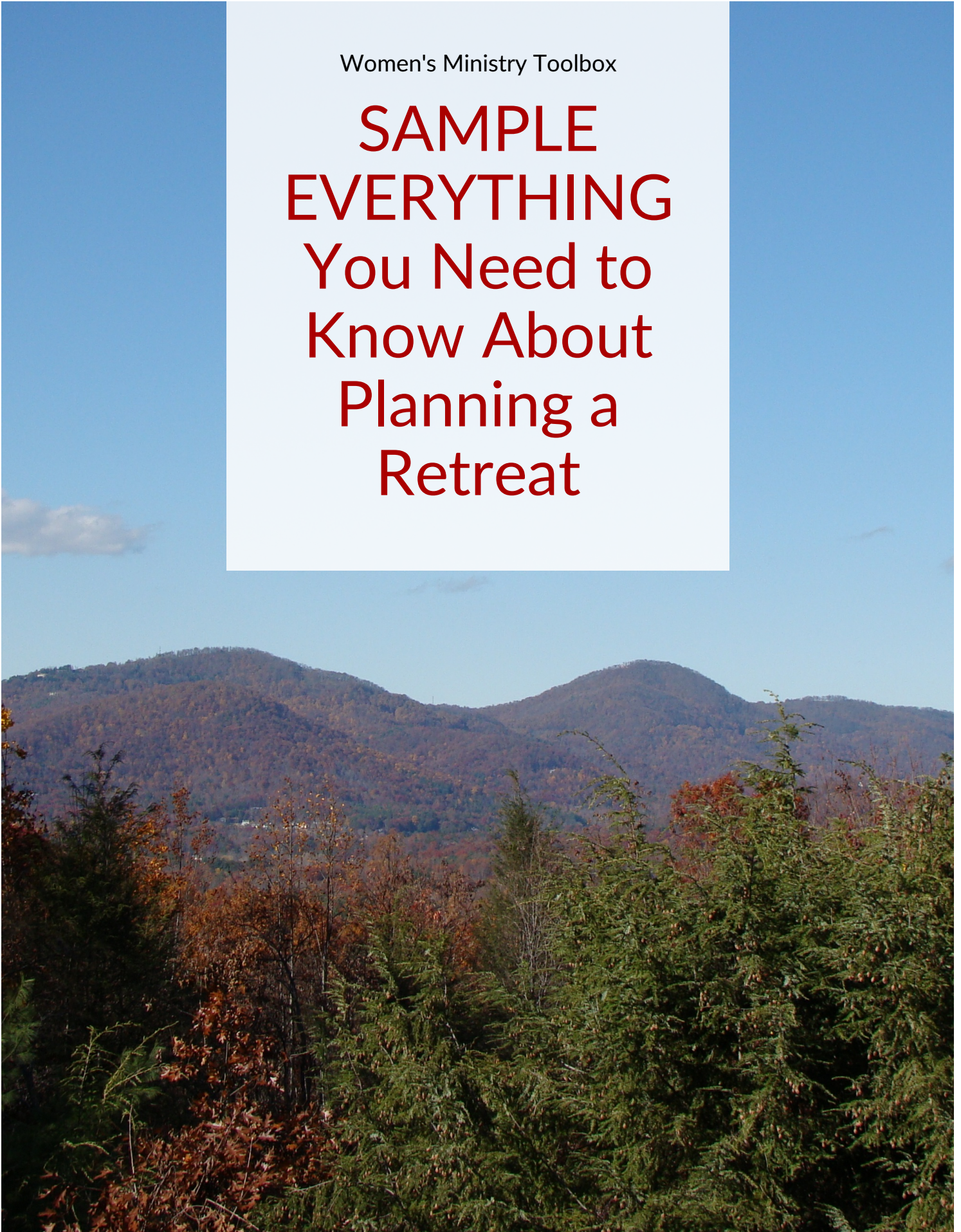


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Introduction

Please note: This is just a SAMPLE of the EVERYTHING You Need to Know About Planning a Retreat Book.

Planning a retreat is an overwhelming task even if you're a seasoned planner.

There are so many details to keep up with - you've got to:

- Find a location
- Determine the price
- Search for a speaker
- Set the schedule
- Create a program
- Register your women
- And so much more!

Pulling from almost two decades of retreat experience, I've poured out almost everything I know about retreat planning on these pages before you.

We start at the very beginning with those basic questions of why, when, and where.

I'll help you tackle registration details, programs, and even share real retreat schedules with you.

We'll dig into fun details like photo booths and goodie bags.

You're welcome to gather and glean what's most helpful for your group of women. Take the ideas shared here and tweak them as needed.

I want to help you host the best retreat you possibly can.

Let's get started! - *Cyndee*

About The Author



Cyndee Ownbey is a retreat enthusiast and a cheerleader for Women's Ministry. She is a seasoned Women's Ministry Leader and the creator of [Women's Ministry Toolbox](#) – a free online resource for women's ministry teams.

Type-A to the core, Cyndee is one of a rare breed that finds organizing events exciting and her enthusiasm for it is contagious. A stickler for details and an avid list-maker, she relishes a good agenda and embraces opportunities to share the information she's gathered and gleaned with others.

Cyndee longs for women to experience God on a personal level. A prayer warrior, Cyndee encourages women's ministry teams to be put prayer before their plans, seek confirmation in God's Word, and to wait on His timing.

As God led her family from North Carolina to Kentucky and back, she's had the privilege to serve on three women's ministry teams in three different churches. She knows the challenges of a smaller church and the stresses of overseeing a multi-campus women's ministry program.

Cyndee lives with her husband, two teen boys, and their miniature schnauzer in Charlotte, North Carolina. When she's not serving in their church or encouraging women's ministry leaders online, you will likely find her buried in a book (Christian fiction), cooking for her family, or watching sports with her crew.

Is God calling your women to retreat?

There's no ifs, ands, or buts about it - **planning a retreat is a BIG deal** No matter the size of your church, it takes a dedicated team to pull it all together. It can be expensive, exhaustive, and time consuming.

The decision of whether or not to plan a women's ministry retreat should always be a matter of prayer.

You're not called to go on retreat just because:

1. It's expected (for whatever reason).
2. Your women take a retreat every year.
3. It would be a good thing for your women.

So how do you know if God is calling your women to retreat?

1. God reveals through prayer that it is His will for your women.
2. You have the support of your Pastor.
3. God has given you (and most, if not all, of your team members) peace to move forward and plan.

If you don't have all 3, I urge you not to move forward until you do!

As you and your team pray and seek God's will, be careful to **ask the Lord to direct, not just bless, your plans.**

There is a huge difference in asking God to bless your plans and asking God if a retreat should even be in your plans.

We're not asking God WHERE we should go. We're asking God IF we should go.
(We'll get to the where soon!)

You may be wondering **how far in advance should you pray and start planning?**

I learned this year not to limit God. He can pull all the details together quickly, if needed.

Would I love a year to fully plan and pray thru every detail? Absolutely!

If decisions were based on a calendar, I wouldn't just be returning from one of the deepest and sweetest retreats I've ever attended.

Ladies, the retreat I just returned from wasn't supposed to happen. Seriously. God had moved out all but 2 of the team members and our church was going through a God and Pastor-led time of simplifying.

There was not going to be a retreat this year.

God spoke to both of our leaders separately. They each wrestled with God, reminding Him there wasn't supposed to be a retreat this year. The Holy Spirit dropped the topic and the outline for the weekend into their laps. He even provided a location at the price they needed.

They went from start to retreat in less than 4 months.

All 31 of us benefited from their obedience.

So if God is pricking your heart about a women's ministry retreat, please pray about it and step forward in faith if He says "yes."

15 Benefits of a Women's Ministry Retreat

Before we start planning, we need to tackle the “why”.

Why are women's ministry retreats important?

Why are they needed?

Why do women need to get away?

[Meriam Webster](#) defines a retreat as “a period of group withdrawal for prayer, meditation, study, or instruction under a director.”

I love that the definition includes the word “ **withdrawal**”.

Something special happens when you physically gather women away from the church and away from their daily responsibilities and distractions for the sole purpose of spending time in the Word.

As you pray and plan consider these **15 Benefits of a Women's Ministry Retreat**

(in no particular order)

1. Relationship building
2. Concentrated time studying God's Word
3. Discovering deeper/new meaning to a section of scripture
4. Increasing Biblical knowledge
5. Times of prayer with other women
6. Sharing experiences with one another

7. Encouragement from other women
8. Times of refreshment and renewal
9. Quiet moments to hear from the Holy Spirit
10. Sacred moments of worship
11. Laughter and fun
12. Concentrated time together with friends (old and new)
13. Biblical guidance and counseling from wise women
14. Adult conversations
15. Spiritual growth

You may want to print out the list, add to it, and then use it as a checklist as you plan.

How to Pick a Retreat Theme

With my whole heart I believe you need to pick a theme (*call it focus, if you'd rather*) for your retreat.

It can be really tempting to "Google" retreat themes and then pick out one that you and your team love.

Can I suggest a different method? Please?

God knows what your women need. He has a very specific theme in mind for your specific group. He knows the heart of your women. He knows what your church has been through and what your church will go through before you head off on your retreat.

God is faithful. He will absolutely will reveal your theme to you if you go looking for it. Jeremiah 33:3 says, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."

Two of the three teams I've served on have prayerfully sought a women's ministry theme and verse for each year. Our retreats tied into those themes. Our events, activities, and retreat were like branches of a tree or spokes of a wheel (almost) all connecting with that theme and verse for the year.

Even though we had our theme for the year, we still prayed about the specific direction within that theme that God wanted us to focus on at our retreat.

But what if you don't have a specific theme or verse for your women's ministry year?

How do you know what direction God is pointing you?

You look for God to repeat Himself. When I'm praying about and seeking a theme or verse, God will give it to me repeatedly. It might appear in my quiet time, again during our Sunday sermon, and pop up in our Bible study lesson. It might be in a song I hear seemingly every time I get in the car. Those are not coincidences – that is God trying to get your attention!

Be patient. You might get these little God nudges over the period of a month, or maybe just a couple of weeks. I don't move on it until I am certain.

As a team we have always settled on our theme first, before we seek out a speaker or decide what type of retreat we're going to have. (*More on the types of retreats in the next chapter!*)

We don't "Google" until we've heard from God first!

Can God direct you to a book or a speaker? Absolutely! If you seek the theme from Him first, you'll know it's the right book or speaker if it aligns with what He's already told/shown you.

Can God impact our women and bless our choices no matter how we've made them? Yes, He can!

However, when decisions are blanketed in prayer from start to finish and based on God's will rather than our own, there's a distinct difference in the end product.

Can I issue a word of caution? Some of your team members may not have experience seeking the Lord's direction in this way. It may help if you share HOW God led you to the theme that He has. You may even need to take time for the team to pray before moving forward. Ask God to give you unity and peace as you seek to move forward.

We want our women to see God's hand, not ours in the plans of the retreat.

5 Ways to Pray for Your Retreat

It goes without saying that **praying for your retreat is paramount**

Your speaker, your team, and your attendees will likely confront spiritual opposition during the weeks and days prior to your retreat.

Prayer is our greatest weapon, but we sometimes forget how to use it.

When I am knee deep in the trenches of retreat planning my creative juices sometimes dry up when it comes to praying for the retreat. I know I need to pray, but what should I pray?

Should you encounter the same situation, I've got some help for you.

There are many ways you can ensure prayer coverage for your retreat.

1. **Enlist women to serve on a Retreat Prayer Team.** That team may wish to meet regularly (1-2 times a month or weekly) prior to the retreat to pray over all the details.
2. **Host a Prayer Time for the retreat at your church.** Invite all church members to participate and provide prayer prompts.
3. **Pray out loud during your Retreat Planning Team meetings.** Set aside time for all of your team members to all pray out loud too.
4. Once registration has been completed, **divide up the names of the attendees** amongst your Retreat Prayer Team and/or Retreat Planning Team and ask them to pray specifically for those women.
5. **Distribute a Prayer Calendar** to your team covering the 30 days prior to the retreat.

Years ago a dear friend on our Retreat Prayer Team created a **Retreat Prayer Calendar**.

I hung her Prayer Calendar on my bathroom mirror. As I brushed my teeth each morning I would offer up the specific request for that day.

For our retreat this past September I created a **Prayer Calendar** for our team.

I'm happy to share it with you! You can tweak it for your own event or use it as is. Each day has a specific request and a scripture verse. I've grouped the prayers together by category – planning team, speaker, music, location, women, and spiritual growth.

Click to open the free PDF file: [30 Days of Praying for our retreat](#)

You are more than welcome to make copies for your retreat team.

You may want to utilize all five prayer ideas for your retreat or just one or two. Do what's right for you!

Free Time Ideas

Between the speaker sessions, discussion groups, prayer, meals, worship, and icebreakers, the schedule is filling up fast!

You may wonder if you *really* need to block out some free time for your women.

I'm here to tell you, yes you do!

Why women need free time:

1 . It builds relationship.

Sitting and listening to a speaker is great, but your women need time to visit and get to know one another.

2. Your women need time to process the message.

Let the message sink in. Give their ears and minds a little recovery time.

3. Hearts need time to soften.

Some of your women are going to struggle with feelings of conviction, uncovering hidden sins, and fresh revelations of an issue that needs healing or forgiveness or repentance. Give them time to get to that place of repentance or forgiveness.

4. Girls just wanna have fun!

Seriously though, sometimes I think we get a bad rap as Christians. People think we don't know how to have fun. Allow women time to have a little fun – they might want to head to the outlet mall, take in a movie, go on a hike, play cards in their room, or just grab a coffee.

5. Rest.

Some of your women physically need to take a break. Whether they are older and need that afternoon nap to make it through the evening or they are a tired mom

who wants nothing more than to nap without having to listen for the baby monitor. Keep in mind some of your women have health issues that you know nothing about.

6. God can use that free time to make connections.

Women whose paths may never cross at church on Sunday morning will connect over the course of the weekend. God may be planting seeds of a new friendship or mentoring relationship. Give it time to grow.

God uses the free time to build relationships, soften hearts, and engrave His word on our hearts.

It's helpful to include a few ideas and travel directions for free time activities in your retreat program.

Look to include:

1. Outlet malls
2. Antique stores/flea markets
3. Quaint shopping areas
4. Orchards
5. Hiking trails
6. Unique tourist spots (gem mines, waterfalls, museums, etc.)
7. Movie theater location
8. Ice cream shops, bakeries, and other spots for snagging a sweet treat
9. Activities women can enjoy on site

You don't need to include pages of details, descriptions, and directions. Most of your ladies will "Google" if they need more details. And most have a GPS in their phone.

Your job is just to make them aware of what is in the area.

Some of your ladies just need to get out and off the retreat property for a bit. They'll return refreshed and ready to go!

This past September three of us decided to brave the rain and head to the apple orchard. We were thrilled and surprised to encounter live music and cloggers! *It was so much fun!*

We sampled apples and fudge. I bought a peck of apples and a jar of sweet potato pecan butter (*which is as good as it sounds*). I am reminded of our retreat weekend every time I eat them.

While it can be tempting to pack your retreat time as full as you possible can, don't underestimate the value of a little downtime for your ladies!