

Letters to Myself

divine . delight . defeat . desires

Teen Girl
Retreat

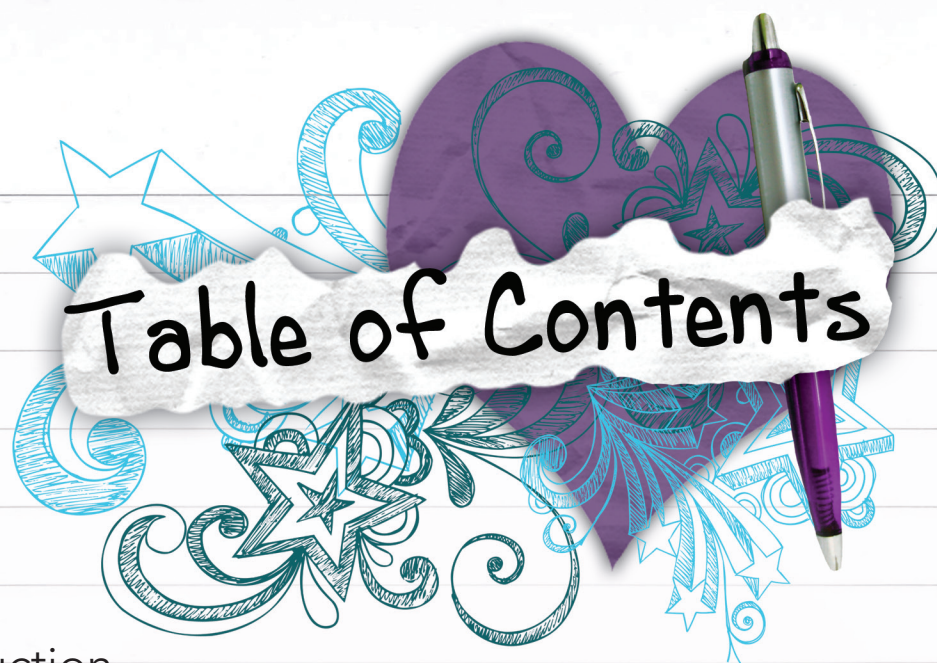
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introduction

Have you ever felt like you have a great group of girls in your youth group, but that they have trouble connecting? Maybe they spend more time nagging each other and being catty than they do on developing relationships with each other. Or maybe you have a great group of girls who have deep relationships, but they are lacking substance in their relationships with the Lord. Whatever your situation, getting girls together and away from home for a weekend can help girls develop relationships and deepen their walk with the Lord.

Goal

The Teen Girl Retreat could be exactly what you're looking for. The main goal for the retreat is twofold. The first goal is for girls to grow deeper in their relationship with God. The second goal is for girls to grow deeper in their relationships with one another. As with most retreats, many girls will experience emotional highs in their relationship with the Lord and with others, but this retreat is designed to help girls sustain their newfound growth.

Flexibility

The Teen Girl Retreat can be exactly what you need it to be. It's designed to be flexible. You can pack everything into a day, or stretch the retreat out into a full three-day weekend. It's meant to be molded to fit your personality and the personality of your group. Most of the sessions are discussion-oriented, so girls can talk freely about where they're at and you can share from your own life experiences.

This retreat will incorporate thought-provoking discussion, quiet time for reflection, and plenty of time to kick back and have fun. Here are a few things to consider before you get started:

1. Where to go? You may not have to have a huge travel budget or be able take

your girls to a four-star resort, but it definitely helps to get away. Consider having the retreat at your church, in your home, or at a retreat center. If your group is small, consider booking a large suite at a hotel.

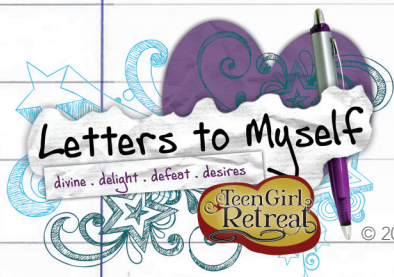
If your group is large, check into reserving a retreat center or campground. Many retreat centers offer reduced rates in the off-season.

2. Who's taking the lead? As a girls retreat, it's good for it to be a girls-only event. The Teen Girl Retreat runs well with a team of women, but can be run with as few as two leaders. Make sure all of the leaders involved know that this retreat will require their involvement and willingness to be vulnerable. Nobody gets to sit back and observe on this one.

3. How much? Your church may have the budget to cover the expenses for your retreat, but it is recommended that the retreat cost the girls something. We value what we pay for, so even a small registration fee to cover meals is recommended. On the other hand, many churches simply don't have a budget to cover events like this, but make sure that the registration fee doesn't restrict some girls from being able to attend.

4. Who's coming? Make sure you announce the retreat with enough advance for girls to make arrangements to come. Ask your youth pastor for permission to announce the retreat in youth group. Often students don't pay much attention to announcements, so invite girls personally and talk with parents. Make flyers for the girls with information about the retreat, where it will take place, what to bring, and how much it will cost (See promotional flyers at the back of the appendix section).

Since the Teen Girl Retreat is mostly discussion-oriented, here are a few pointers for leading small group discussion:



- **Don't be afraid of silence.** Sometimes girls are formulating answers, processing emotions, or coming up with the boldness to speak up. Allow time for silence. It will probably feel pretty awkward, but sometimes allowing up to a few minutes of silence can be incredibly helpful. Ask the question again, rewording it with more explanation. Share from your own experience. As a last resort, call on an individual to speak up.

- **Avoid lopsided discussions.** Some girls will be much more willing to speak up than others, but make sure everyone gets a chance to share. You may find it necessary to gently cut some girls off and draw others out. Ask quiet girls to respond to something that's already been said rather than making her share about herself right away.

- **Press the issue.** Don't be afraid to ask girls to elaborate on their answers. Girls (especially younger girls) have a tendency to share about friends or things they've heard about rather than sharing from their personal experience. Ask "How did that affect you?" or "What did you think about that?" If a girl shares short or incomplete answers, don't be afraid to ask "Could you tell us a little more about that?"

- **Find the balance.** Girls love to talk, but sometimes the conversation might veer off into the land of completely unrelated topics. If this happens, gently guide the conversation back on track. Sometimes the offtopic subject is something girls really need to talk about. So be sensitive to that and allow the Holy Spirit to guide the discussion.

- **Consider your audience.** Know the attention span of the girls in your group. It may be helpful to divide girls into smaller groups by age. Younger girls may not be able to sit still and talk as long as older girls will want to. Plan to let the younger girls have some more free time to get up and move around.

{ schedule }

one day retreat

9:00 a.m.	arrival & breakfast prayer request clouds* introductions
10:00 a.m.	welcome opening activity* guidelines and goals*
10:30 a.m.	worship
10:45 a.m.	session one
11:15 a.m.	session one activity
12:00 p.m.	lunch game*
12:30 p.m.	session two
1:00 p.m.	session two activity
1:15 p.m.	craft*
2:15 p.m.	session three
2:45 p.m.	session three activity
3:00 p.m.	choose a side*
3:15 p.m.	session four
3:45 p.m.	session four activity
4:00 p.m.	closing activity*
4:15 p.m.	clean up/pack up/wrap up
5:00 p.m.	head home

*Instructions and suggestions in Appendix

As the Girls Arrive

As the girls arrive, have them fill out the "Prayer Request Cloud." As each girl completes her prayer request cloud, hang them from fishing line some place visible throughout your retreat.



When everyone has arrived, make introductions, pray for breakfast, and enjoy some good food!

Welcome & Opening Activity

As the girls are finishing their breakfast, begin the opening activity. Talk about what the girls will be learning during this retreat and what you hope they will take away with them.

Pass out and review the "Guidelines & Goals."

Worship & Session One

Begin the session with about 10-15 minutes of worship (either with a live piano/guitar or a CD) and then share "Session One: Divine." Close the session with prayer, using the suggestions given in the session handout or by praying as you feel lead.

Collect the "Prayer Request Clouds" that were hanging from the fishing line and pass them out to the girls at random. Instruct the girls to spend a few minutes praying for the request on the cloud. Rehang at the end of this session.

Pass out the supplies and explain the corresponding session one activity.

Lunch & Games

Break for lunch and play one of the suggested board games (or another game you've prepared).

Session Two

Share "Session Two: Delight" with the girls, allowing time for them to complete the corresponding session two activity.

Craft

Spend time working on a craft. Play music in the background and allow the girls to chat. You might even provide snacks.

Sessions Three

Share "Session Three: Defeats" with the girls, allowing them time to complete the corresponding session three activity.

Choose a Side

This activity will allow your girls to reflect on what they believe and will be a visual way for girls to see where their peers stand. It will also be a great way to stimulate conversation as you give the girls a chance to defend their answers. See suggested questions in the appendix.

Session Four

Share "Session Four: Desires" with the girls, allowing them time to complete the corresponding session four activity.

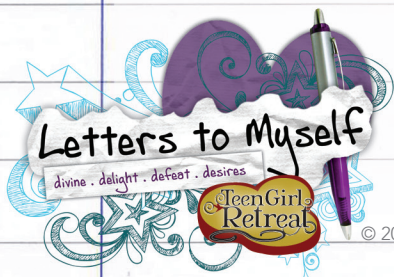
Closing Activity

Have the girls retrieve the sticky notes they had written on during the opening activity. Find the instructions and handout for the closing activity in the appendix of this packet.

Collect the "Prayer Request Clouds" that were hanging from the fishing line and pass them out to the girls at random. Instruct the girls to spend a few minutes praying for the request on the cloud.

Clean Up, Pack Up, & Wrap Up

After you've completed the goal-setting activity, take a break and encourage the girls to help you clean up. Make sure the room is ready for the next group who will use it. Ask the girls if they have any questions or any comments about your time together.



{ schedule }

two day retreat

6:30 p.m.	arrival & dinner prayer request clouds* introductions
7:15 p.m.	welcome opening activity* guidelines and goals*
7:30 p.m.	worship
7:45 p.m.	session one
8:15 p.m.	craft*
9:30 p.m.	games*

9:00 a.m.	breakfast game*
10:00 a.m.	sessions two & three
11:00 a.m.	choose a side*
Noon	lunch
1:30 p.m.	session four
2:30 p.m.	closing activity*
3:00 p.m.	clean up/pack up/wrap up
4:00 p.m.	head home

*Instructions and suggestions in Appendix

As the Girls Arrive

As the girls arrive, have them fill out the "Prayer Request Cloud." As each girl completes her prayer request cloud, hang them from fishing line some place visible throughout your retreat.

When everyone has arrived, make introductions, pray for dinner, and enjoy some good food!

Welcome & Opening Activity

As the girls are finishing their dinner, begin the opening activity. Talk about what the girls will be learning during this retreat and what you hope they will take away with them.

Pass out and review the "Guidelines & Goals."

Worship & Session One

Begin the session with about 10-15 minutes of worship (either with a live piano/guitar or a CD) and then share "Session One: Divine." Close the session with prayer, using the suggestions given in the session handout or by praying as you feel lead.

Collect the "Prayer Request Clouds" that were hanging from the fishing line and pass them out to the girls at random. Instruct the girls to spend a few minutes praying for the request on the cloud. Rehang at the end of this session.

Pass out the supplies and explain the corresponding session one activity.

Craft

Spend time working on a craft. Play music in the background and allow the girls to chat. You might even provide snacks.

Games

Call it a night and play one of the suggested board games (or another game you've prepared).

Breakfast

Use breakfast preparation as a teaching moment by letting the girls help in the kitchen. As everyone is eating, play a game.

Sessions Two & Three

Share "Session Two: Delight" and "Session Three: Defeats" with the girls, allowing them time to complete the corresponding session activities.

Choose a Side

This activity will allow your girls to reflect on what they believe and will be a way for the girls to visually see where their peers stand. It will also generate good conversation as girls get a chance to explain their answers. See suggested questions in the appendix.

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Lunch

Break for lunch. Get the conversation rolling by asking a few of the questions below:

- What is the most embarrassing thing that has happened to you in front of a guy?
- What was the worst fashion faux pas you've ever made?
- What secret talent or skill do you possess that not a lot of people know about?
- What movie or television show do you love that you're embarrassed to admit?

Session Four

Share "Session Four: Desires" with the girls, allowing time for them to complete the corresponding session four activity.

Closing Activity

Have the girls retrieve the sticky notes they had written on during the opening activity. Find the instructions and handout for the closing activity in the appendix of this packet.

Collect the "Prayer Request Clouds" that were hanging from the fishing line and pass them out to the girls at random. Instruct the girls to spend a few minutes praying for the request on the cloud.

Clean Up, Pack Up, & Wrap Up

After you've completed the goal-setting activity, take a break and encourage the girls to help you clean up. Make sure the room is ready for the next group who will use it. Ask the girls if they have any questions or any comments about your time together.

{ schedule }

three day retreat

6:00 p.m.	arrival & dinner prayer request clouds* introductions
8:00 p.m.	welcome opening activity* guidelines and goals*
8:15 p.m.	worship prayer request clouds
8:45 p.m.	craft*
10:00 p.m.	games*

9:00 a.m.	breakfast
10:00 a.m.	session one
10:45 a.m.	special interest segment
12:00 p.m.	lunch talk time
1:30 p.m.	session two
2:15 p.m.	snacks
2:30 p.m.	session three
3:15 p.m.	choose a side*
3:30 p.m.	craft* movie
5:00 p.m.	dinner
6:30 p.m.	worship
6:45 p.m.	session four
7:30 p.m.	special interest segment
8:45 p.m.	snacks & games*

9:00 a.m.	breakfast
9:45 a.m.	worship prayer request clouds
10:15 a.m.	closing activity*
10:30 a.m.	goal setting*
11:00 a.m.	clean up/pack up/wrap up

*Instructions and suggestions in Appendix



As the Girls Arrive

As the girls arrive, have them fill out the "Prayer Request Cloud." As each girl completes her prayer request cloud, hang them from fishing line some place visible throughout your retreat.

When everyone has arrived, make introductions, pray for dinner, and enjoy some good food!

Welcome & Opening Activity

As the girls are finishing their dinner, begin the opening activity. Talk about what the girls will be learning during this retreat and what you hope they will take away with them.

Pass out and review the "Guidelines & Goals."

Worship & Session One

Begin the session with about 10-15 minutes of worship (either with a live piano/guitar or a CD).

Collect the "Prayer Request Clouds" that were hanging from the fishing line and pass them out to the girls at random. Instruct the girls to spend a few minutes praying for the request on the cloud. Rehang at the end of this session.

Craft

Spend time working on a craft. Play music in the background and allow the girls to chat. You might even provide snacks.

Games

Call it a night and play one of the suggested board games (or another game you've prepared).

Breakfast

Use breakfast preparation as a teaching moment by letting the girls help in the kitchen. As everyone is eating, play a game.

Session One

Share "Session One: Divine" with the girls, allowing time for them to complete the corresponding session one activity.

Special Interest Segment

You know your girls pretty well! Fill this segment with something you know your girls will love. If they're athletic, organize a soccer game. If they're creative, bring in an artist to share tips on watercoloring. If they like being in the kitchen, bring in a local chef or baker to teach your girls a thing or two. If they love to do make-up, bring in a Mary Kay, Arbonne, Avon, etc., representative to teach your girls about skin care. The possibilities are endless!

Lunch

Break for lunch. Get the conversation rolling by asking a few of the questions below:

- What is the most embarrassing thing that has happened to you in front of a guy?
- What was the worst fashion faux pas you've ever made?
- What secret talent or skill do you possess that not a lot of people know about?
- What movie or television show do you love that you're embarrassed to admit?

Session Two

Share "Session Two: Delight" with the girls, allowing time for them to complete the corresponding session two activity.

Snacks

Take a quick snack break before moving on to the next session!

Session Three

Share "Session Three: Defeats" with the girls, allowing time for them to complete the corresponding session three activity.

Choose a Side

This activity will allow your girls to reflect on what they believe and will be a way for the girls to visually see where their peers stand. It



will also generate good conversation as girls get a chance to explain their answers. See suggested questions in the appendix.

Craft & Movie

Spend time working on a craft. Choose a movie that is appropriate for your group of girls and play it in the background.

Dinner

Worship & Session Four

Begin the session with about 10-15 minutes of worship (either with a live piano/guitar or a CD) and then share "Session Four: Desires." Close the session with prayer, using the suggestions given in the session handout or by praying as you feel led.

Special Interest Segment

Once again, fill this segment with something you know your girls will love — sports, arts, cooking, beauty tips.

Since this segment doesn't start until after dinner, use your best judgment as you choose the activity your girls will do — time of night, weather conditions, before or after sunset, etc.

Snacks & Games

Call it a night and play one of the suggested board games (or another game you've prepared). Serve snacks and let the girls have fun getting to be together.

Breakfast

As another teaching moment, encourage different girls help with breakfast preparation this morning. As everyone is eating, play a game.

Worship

Begin the session with about 10-15 minutes of worship (either with a live piano/guitar or a CD). Once again, pass out the "Prayer Request Clouds" that were hanging from the fishing line and pass them out to the girls at random. Instruct the girls to spend a few minutes praying for the request on the cloud.

Closing Activity

Have the girls retrieve the sticky notes they had written on during the opening activity. Find the instructions and handout for the closing activity in the appendix of this packet.

Goal Setting

Pass out the "Goal-Setting" handout. After such honest self-evaluation the girls are probably ready to start making some changes in their lives. This is a great opportunity to launch into a new devotional series or Bible reading schedule. Pray with the girls and allow them plenty of time to set goals for themselves. Encourage them to share their goals with an accountability partner.

Clean Up, Pack Up, & Wrap Up

After you've completed the goal-setting activity, take a break and encourage the girls to help you clean up. Make sure the room is ready for the next group who will use it. Ask the girls if they have any questions or any comments about your time together.



Sessions



session #1: divine

Have you ever had times when you've thought about the past and could see how God specifically orchestrated the different events of your life in order to guide and direct you to the point you're at right now? Isn't it amazing and reassuring to see how in control He is? It can be so easy to go about our days without really grasping divine interventions from God as He leads us day by day.

A common practice upheld by people in the Old Testament was to make an altar to signify the big God moments they had. Take a look at the following examples:

Have a girl read Genesis 8:15-20.

discuss What big God moment was Noah pausing to reflect about through building his altar?

For those of you who know the story of Noah's Ark, how could he look back into the past and see God directing him?

[Paraphrase Genesis 28:10-15] Have a girl read Genesis 28:16-19.

Jacob had a big encounter with God in a dream, so to commemorate that experience, he anointed a stone with oil and would forever remember that God moment when he returned to that place.

Looking ahead in the story, Jacob did return to Bethel.

Have a girl read Genesis 35:1-3; 6,7; 14,15.

This is the great part about building an altar to signify our big God moments — we can always remember God's faithfulness to us when we revisit the altar place or when we see the object that symbolizes the altar.

discuss Can you think of a big God moment that happened in your own life like what we see here in Noah or Jacob's life? **[Allow a few girls to share.]**

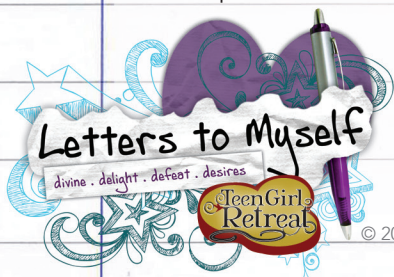
There are three things that happen when we build altars:

1. It is an act of worship. By literally or symbolically building an altar to the Lord, you are taking the time to recognize His work in your life. You are giving Him the praise and the glory for what has just happened and you are crediting the One who rightly deserves the credit — God!

2. It is an act of submission. It is a way of telling God that the big moment you just experienced with Him would not have happened if it weren't for His compassion, direction, and power. It is a way of humbling yourself in His presence and surrendering your life and all of its future events to Him.

3. It changes your outlook. In the examples we see in the Old Testament, the people went forward with a new vision and a new passion. They could look back on the experiences they just had of God's faithfulness and it encouraged them and excited them as they moved forward with life.

It's important to remember that an altar you create to commemorate God's work in your life is not an idol. The altar you create is not meant to be worshiped in place of God — it is meant to serve as a physical reminder to you of God's blessing, direction, and favor in your life that causes you to want to praise God for all of those things when you see that reminder.



Have a girl read Exodus 20:1-6.

Anything that becomes more important to you — more of a priority to you — than God, is considered an idol. You worship that “thing” by giving it your time, your attention, or even your money.

In a day and age when we have so many distractions and demands on our time, it's even more important to make altars — to spend quality time worshiping God — that elevate God to the highest position in our life. If we look back at the passage we just read where it says, “for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” we see that He desires to be number one in our lives, and why wouldn't we want Him to be? He created us! No one knows us more intimately than He does. No one sees the big picture or has our lives figured out for us better like He does. No one loves us or cares for us the way He does. He deserves our time and attention and to be given all of the praise and honor for the successes we have here on Earth.

closing prayer

Pray that God continues to reveal himself to the girls as they surrender themselves to Him.

Pray that the hearts of the girls will be softened to be able to sense God speaking to them and guiding them.

Pray that the girls will have a greater passion to serve God and that in all circumstances they would praise Him.

Pray that as you move into the next activity that the girls would really understand what it means to make an altar to the Lord and to dedicate themselves to Him.

session #1 activity

What You Need:

- One tissue box for each girl (consider having girls bring their own)
- Magazines (that can be used to create collages)
- Photographs (instruct the girls to bring a few photos of important people or events in their lives that can be used in a permanent collage)
- Scissors
- Glue
- Other decorating materials (glitter, jewels or rhinestones, construction paper, markers, etc.)

What To Do:

Instruct the girls to spend time covering their tissue box with sayings, Scripture verses, magazine clippings, photographs, etc., that represent the big God moments in their lives. This box will be a key part of the rest of the sessions throughout the retreat. Be sure to instruct them to keep the hole cut in the center open.



session #2: delight

Have you ever stopped to think about how amazingly complex the human body is? Here are some facts you might not know:

The air from a human sneeze can travel at speeds of 100 MPH.

When you sneeze, all your bodily functions stop – even your heart.

Human thigh bones are stronger than concrete.

Our eyes are the same size from birth, but our nose and ears never stop growing.

An average human scalp has 100,000 hairs.

Your fingernails grow twice as fast as your toenails.

Humans shed about 600,000 particles of skin every hour, which is about 1.5 pounds each year, so the average person will lose around 100 pounds of skin by the age of 70.

Every human spent about half an hour as a single cell.

Babies are born with 350 bones, but humans end up with about 206 bones as adults.

Similar to fingerprints, everyone also has a unique tongue print.

The human nose can remember about 50,000 different scents.

During his or her lifetime, the average human produces about 25,000 quarts of saliva – enough to fill two swimming pools.

You are a designer original. God created you in His image. Uniquely. Intentionally. And He even spent time doing it.

Have a girl read Psalm 139:13-16 in the Message version.

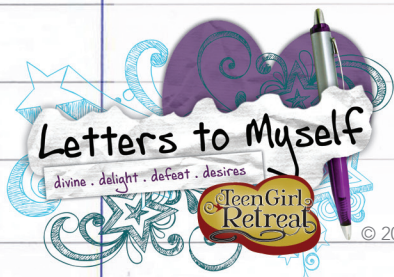
Just as a clothing or handbag designer puts time and care into his creations and can charge an extraordinary amount of money for the brand, so is it with us. God, the highest-end creator and designer of all, put time and care into His work creating you and instead of looking in the mirror and noting our flaws, we need to marvel at the detail God put into us and the plan He's laying out for us. Do you think a Prada purse sits around feeling down because it has a gold zipper instead of a silver zipper? Probably not. It knows it's awesome and that its designer had that in mind from the start.

Have a girl read Romans 9:20.

discuss What physical characteristics or personality traits have you questioned God about giving you? How do they affect your self-esteem?

How would you feel if you put a lot of time and attention creating something and then there was a lot of complaining about it?

How can God use your areas of weakness or insecurity?



Let's take a look at someone in the Bible who had a major insecurity to overcome.

Have a girl read Exodus 3:1-12. Have another girl pick up the story again at Exodus 4:10-12.

Moses was really insecure with the way he talked. It affected his self-esteem because he felt unworthy and incapable of doing what God was asking him to do. Instead of recognizing his value in the Lord, he was caught thinking about how his imperfect human body was going to inhibit God's big heavenly mission He wanted to send Moses on. When we get stuck focusing on our weaknesses we can miss out on the big things God has in store for us.

Do you have a speech impediment? Do you think you would be a more effective servant for God if you could just change something about your body? Or just change something about your personality? Or just change something about your style?

Psalm 139:16 says that "You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed" (NLT). God had a plan for your life before He even made you — isn't that amazingly encouraging? When He presents an opportunity for you to share God's love with a hurting friend, thank Him for the 72 muscles that intricately work together to formulate your speech. He gave you 45 miles of nerves on your skin to be able to sense the warmth of a family member's hug. And He put a quarter of all of the bones in your body in your feet so you would be equipped to go into all of the world to share His love ... your high school, your family, other nations, the needy families in your city, your teammates ... all of the world.

"Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires" (Psalm 37:4, NLT). Desires for peace; desires for fulfillment; desires for joy, love, and hope. So instead of stressing over your straight hair, your curvy thighs, your silly laugh, or your worn out shoes, take a minute to think about how amazing God is, and delight in the gift of life.

closing prayer

Pray that God will open the girls' eyes to see how precious they are to Him and to recognize His craftsmanship in how they were uniquely created.

Pray that God will begin to do a work in the minds of the girls who are struggling with their appearances or their self-worth, and that He will completely transform the way they think of themselves.

Pray that God will shield the girls from the negative influences in our society and that He will help them be an encouragement to their friends.



session #2 activity

What You Need:

- For each girl, print one "Attributes List" handout from the Appendix
- Pens/pencils
- Covered tissue boxes from previous activity

What To Do:

Instruct the girls to create a list of attributes they like about themselves — both physical and personality characteristics — in the first column, and then instruct the girls to create a list of attributes of themselves that they don't like but can't change. Play music in the background during this time to create a setting of worship. When it seems like everyone has finished writing, ask the girls a few discussion questions:

What did you discover by doing this exercise? Do you have more attributes that you like or more attributes that you don't like about yourself?

What can you do to make peace with the things you don't like about yourself?

How can God use the attributes you like for His glory? Ex: outgoing personality, musical giftings, ability to communicate, patience, etc.

Instruct the girls to fold their paper and slip it into their tissue box. Have them spend a few minutes in prayer, committing themselves to God and surrendering the things on the list to Him. Close in prayer over all of the girls, using the prompts below if needed:

Thank God for their lives and for His plans for them.

Ask God to help them in the areas they are weak and insecure.

Ask God to help them accept and begin to appreciate the areas that they don't like about themselves at this moment.

Ask God to help them be an encouragement to other girls who are struggling with their value or their physical appearance.

Thank God for His faithfulness and love for all of you.



session #3: defeats

One thing that's really exciting about getting older is being able to look back on your past and see how God has brought you from where you were at a particular phase of life, to where you are now. Even now as a junior high or high schooler, I'm sure you can look back over the last few years and see how God used the decisions you made, the people you encountered, and even the rough patches you endured to bring you to where you are today.

The story of Joseph from the Old Testament is a truly remarkable example of this. At the end of Joseph's life we can see where everything he went through made sense. We can see how it all fit together and how God worked out the situation for good. Let's take a look:

[Paraphrase Genesis 39:1-18] Have a girl read Genesis 37:19-28.

In the moment, none of this would have made sense to Joseph. In fact, he probably thought his life was over. He was being taken to a foreign land, sold into slavery, and no one would know where to come rescue him. You can see where this must have been a horribly difficult time for Joseph.

[Paraphrase Genesis 37:1-10] Have a girl read Genesis 39:11-20.

Again, how horrible! Joseph was finally adjusting to a new life and then he was thrown in jail because he was wrongly accused. But at the end of the chapter we see how God is still very much a part of Joseph's life because the prison warden put him in charge of all of the prisoners.

In the next chapter we see that Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker were also in prison. After having dreams one night, both came to Joseph looking for an interpretation. When the interpretations for both of the dreams came true and the cupbearer and baker were released from prison, all Joseph asked was that they would remember what he had done for them and would testify that he was imprisoned unfairly. But the cupbearer and the baker forgot about him.

Talk about defeating!

But the story takes a turn when Pharaoh himself begins having dreams that he cannot interpret. Enter — Joseph.

Have a girl read Genesis 41:17-24.

Have a girl read Genesis 41:25-32.

Have a girl read Genesis 41:39-41.

Little did Joseph know, the story was just getting good, and every defeating event of the past few years of his life was about to make sense.

The famine was affecting Joseph's family. His father and his brothers were all hungry and in need of food for their families, so they made a trip to Egypt. You can read more about Joseph's encounter with his brothers in Genesis 42-45, but we're going to skip ahead to the end.



Have a girl read Genesis 45:1-11.

Talk about the series of events that Joseph went through to get to where he was.
How can you see God guiding him?

discuss How did good come out of Joseph's defeats?

If older Joseph could write a letter to himself back when he was first taken into slavery,
what do you think he would have said?

Maybe the defeats in your life have been self-inflicted. Most of us can recognize a defeating situation we got ourselves in without too much thought. We tend to know right away when we blow it. Some of us, though, are masters at justifying our actions and seem to need a few months or even years to figure it out on our own. For you, it's easy to look back at the past and see how God has brought you through that mistake to where you are today.

Let's look at a few examples of people who made a mistake:

Have a girl read Genesis 3:1-7.

Have a girl read Genesis 3:8-13.

discuss — What caused Adam and Eve's defeating situation?

Have a girl read Jonah 1:1-11.

Have a girl read Jonah 1:12-17.

In chapter two we see Jonah's prayer to God as he recognizes his mistakes and is coming back to God.
What caused Jonah's defeating situation?

discuss In looking at these two stories, if, years later, they could write letters to themselves before they even got into those defeating situations, what do you think they would say?

Think about everything we've talked about in this session. Maybe you can relate to the first half of the session because you've endured defeating situations that were dealt to you not of your own choosing, but can now look back and see God's guidance through all of it. What words of wisdom or encouragement would you write if you sent a letter to yourself back then?

Maybe you can relate to the second half of the session because you can think of a mistake or two in the last few years that you've made that God has brought you through. What would you say if you could write a letter to yourself before you even made those choices?

closing prayer

Thank God for His compassion and love for us in our good times and in our bad.

Pray that God will use our past circumstances for His glory and that we will be able to be an encouragement for others who might be going through a similar situation.

Pray that God will continue to help us see His hand at work in our lives.



session #3 activity

What You Need:

- For each girl, print one "Letter to Myself" handout from the Appendix
- Pens/pencils
- Covered tissue boxes from previous activity

What To Do:

Instruct the girls to give themselves advice. Have them write a letter to themselves at a significant time in their lives growing up, answering some of the following questions:

What would you tell yourself to watch out for?

How would you encourage yourself?

What advice do you have now that you could give yourself back then?

How can you use this information to encourage someone in your life now?

Play music in the background and allow this to be a great time of reflection. When everyone has finished, instruct the girls to put their letter in the tissue box as a way of surrendering their past defeats to the Lord.



session #4: desires

discuss What were some of the things you dreamed about when we were younger? Things you wanted to be, things you wanted to do, etc.

Have those changed over the years? How?

Sometimes our dreams and desires get bigger as we get older. Instead of dreaming about seeing the new playground down the block, we grow up to dream about seeing the Eiffel Tower. But sometimes our dreams and desires get smaller — more practical — as we get older. Instead of wanting to be the President of the United States, we grow up to dream about being in leadership in our school system, church, or city. Sometimes our dreams and desires as a child were pretty close to what our dreams and desires are now. You may have wanted to be a mermaid when you were younger but have now turned your desires to wanting to be a marine biologist. But sometimes the dreams you had as a child are nothing like the dreams you have now. Archaeology may have seemed so interesting back in the sandbox years, but now the thought of sifting through dirt in the Middle East is enough to make you want to scream and run.

It's amazing how things change as you gain perspective. The perspective you had as a child is nothing compared to the perspective (hopefully!) you have now as a young adult.

Imagine how much more your perspective can change if you learn to see your life through God's eyes!

Have a girl read Ephesians 3:20,21.

Isn't this such an encouraging passage? God has such big plans for our lives if we let Him take control that it'll be beyond what we could even imagine for ourselves.

discuss What does the phrase "according to his power that is at work within us" mean?

There is a level of intimacy and connection with God involved in seeing these "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" events occur in our lives. How can we expect God to do amazing things in our lives if we just have a casual or uncommitted relationship with Him?

What have you always wanted to do but have felt was out of the realm of possibility?

discuss What are the factors that discourage you from going after your dreams and desires?

What obstacles have you already run into while pursuing your dreams and desires?

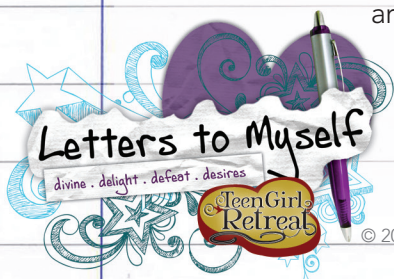
Have a girl read Romans 8:28.

What does this verse tell us about our God-given dreams and desires?

How can this verse be of comfort when you're faced with an obstacle?

Have a girl read Proverbs 13:12.

It can be so frustrating when things don't work out the way you thought they would. When things are harder than expected. When it seems like a losing situation. When you have no support. It's easy to lose hope. But if it's a dream or desire you know that God gave you, He'll see it through with you. And this last Scripture verse is spot on — when we finally see a dream come true it's like a tree of life — a source of joy and inspiration.



So how do we go about developing dreams and desires that honor God?

1. Discover God's primary desire for us.

Have a girl read 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

God's desire is that we would be saved and understand the truth of the Bible. Therefore, our primary dream and desire should be to honor God by committing our lives to Him and asking for forgiveness from our sins if there's never been a moment in life to this point where we've done so. After we've done this, we should be spending the rest of our days on Earth learning and gaining understanding of the Bible!

discuss If you've already become a Christian, what dreams and desires might you develop that relate to gaining understanding of the truth that's in the Bible? Desiring to read the entire Bible through in a year? Starting a Bible study? Committing time everyday for prayer and Bible reading?

2. Determine what God considers earthly desires to be as opposed to godly desires.

Have a girl read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Have a girl read Romans 8:5.

When we know which of our desires don't honor God, it's easier to know which of our desires we should let go of and which we should pursue and develop. Those of us who seem to struggle with wrong desires need to learn to center our thoughts on Christ and let Him begin to change our desires.

Think about your favorite television show. Think about how excited you are the whole day leading up to that show. The excitement about picking up in the story line where it left off the week before — the excitement of being able to talk to your friends about what happened — and the excitement about where the writers are taking the show over the next few weeks.

Imagine how ridiculous it would be if after all that excitement, you didn't get to see your show because you didn't turn on the TV. That's what it's like when we are distracted with worldly desires. We have the anticipation and excitement of wanting to hear from God, but we miss the simple step of focusing all of our attention and actions on "turning on the TV" — of letting everything else go and tuning into God so we can hear from Him.

Have a girl read Galatians 5:24.

This is such a powerful word picture of what we do when we finally get rid of our worldly desires — we symbolically nail them to the cross where Jesus died so we could all have a better life ... and an eternal life in heaven. Think about any desires or plans you have that don't honor God. Desires that have the intent of being selfish or greedy. Desires that would hurt or bring someone else down. Desires that would damage the body God gave you. As we finish up this session, nail them to the Cross and surrender them to Christ.



3. Think about what you're already good at.

Have a girl read Colossians 3:17.

Playing your trumpet, drawing cartoons, learning a second language, baking cupcakes, and babysitting can all be used for God's glory and can be a launching point to developing dreams and desires for your future. In whatever you do, do it as if you're doing it directly for God. Thank Him for entrusting you with the skills and talents He's given you and ask Him to be honored in what you do. Who knows what might come out of the things you already love to do when you dedicate them to God!

discuss

What are some things you're good at that you could see God giving you a dream and desire to do for Him?

4. Seek God's will.

God speaks to people in different ways so it's important to know how He speaks so you can be in tune to Him!

Have a girl read 2 Timothy 3:16.

God speaks through Bible reading. A devotional life is so important because God's Word is alive. It gets into your heart and mind and teaches you and corrects you.

Have a girl read Proverbs 8:34.

God speaks through prayer time. Not only should your prayer time consist of talking to God about your concerns and requests, but it should consist of being quiet and you giving God a chance to speak. Wait at His door everyday out of anticipation for what He is going to say!

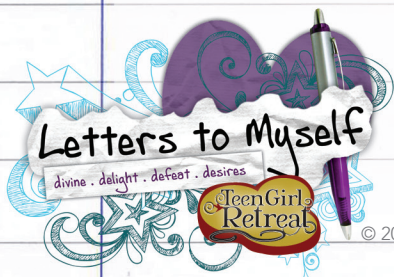
Have a girl read Exodus 18:17-19.

God speaks through other people. Moses was on a path to a major burn-out, but his father-in-law stepped in with some godly words of wisdom. God could speak to you through the wisdom of a friend or a family member who knows you really well. Perhaps they can see a different angle of a situation than you can see. Perhaps they can offer encouragement or point out certain giftings you have that you didn't see before. Perhaps God has prompted them to tell you something that will launch you into a new ministry or calling in life.

Have a girl read John 14:26.

God speaks through recurring thoughts. You could be reminded of a sermon you heard recently, a conversation you had with your mom, a Scripture verse, or even lyrics from a worship song. All of these recurring thoughts could be God trying to speak to you.

Another way God speaks to people is audibly. Out loud. In a voice that can be heard. There are numerous examples in the Bible of people who heard God speak to them and even had full conversations. Adam and Eve, Moses, Samuel — these are just a few.



All of these points we just discussed go into discovering your dreams and desires. There's no set timetable for when a person discovers a dream and there's no special recipe for how to make a dream come true. It's just about making sure your heart is right with God so you're available for what He has for you.



session #4 activity

What You Need:

- For each girl, print one "Dreams and Desires" handout from the Appendix
- Pens/pencils
- Covered tissue boxes from previous activity

What To Do:

With the "Dreams and Desires" worksheet, instruct the girls to spend a few moments writing about their dreams and desires. Not just things for the future, but things they want to do even now at this phase of life. It's easy to fill up our days with busyness and not leave time to think. This will give the girls an opportunity to have some quiet time and dream.

Divide the girls into pairs and give them time to talk to each other about their dreams. Instruct them to not be critical of each other, but to love and support their partner and share constructive thoughts about their dreams.

As conversations wrap up, give the girls time to pray with their partners to:

1. Commit themselves and their dreams to God
2. Ask God for His will to be accomplished and made known to them
3. Guide and direct them as they pursue these dreams and desires
4. Build a team around them so they can have help as they pursue these dreams

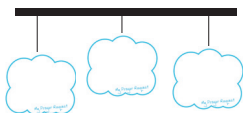
Have the girls fold the worksheet and put them into their covered tissue boxes.



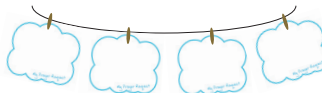
Appendix



Prayer Request Cloud. Duplicate this sheet so each girl in attendance has one. As the girls arrive, have them fill out a cloud with a few prayer requests they have. Hang the clouds on fishing line like one of the two diagrams below:



Option #1: Hang clouds and fishing line from the ceiling or a doorway.



Option #2: Hang clouds with clothes pins from fishing line clothes line.

My Prayer Request

Letters to Myself

divine . delight . defeat . desires

opening activity

What You Need:

One pad of sticky notes for each girl
Pens/pencils

What To Do:

Give each girl one pad of sticky notes. Instruct them to spend some time writing a note to themselves of whatever is going on in their heart or mind right now — something to remember to do or not do, what to wear or not wear again, to remember someone's birthday, etc. Encourage them to keep writing, one new thought per sticky note, until a leader tells them to stop. Allow 30 seconds to one minute. After the time is up, inform the girls that you will revisit this activity later on during your time together.



closing activity

Letters to Myself

divine . delight . defeat . desires

Hand out the "Closing Activity — Letters to Myself" sheet and give the girls time to sort through their sticky notes from the opening session, categorizing them into the session themes discussed:

Divine — thoughts about how God has directed you to where you are now and recognizing His hand in your life.

Delight — thoughts about your beauty, personality, your worth, your self-esteem.

Defeats — thoughts about your failures — things you regret, mistakes you've made, and lessons you've learned.

Desires — thoughts about your future, your goals, and your ambitions.

When the girls have had a chance to categorize their sticky notes, use the following discussion questions to guide the conversation:

- What category is the most full? Empty? What do you think it means?
- Are the thoughts you wrote on your sticky notes primarily positive? Negative? Related to each other? Deep? Shallow? Constructive?
- How do the thoughts that we dwell on — the mental notes we make to ourselves — affect our day-to-day activities?
- How can we do a better job of putting God in the forefront of our thoughts?
- Philippians 4:8 says "Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise" (NLT). How does this verse relate to this activity?



Conclude on a silly but sweet note by reading the book *If God Used Sticky Notes*, by Chris Shea.

closing activity

Letters to myself

Letters to Myself

divine . delight . defeat . desires

divine

delight

defeat

desire





Guidelines & Goals

Be Honest. It is extremely important that you are honest in everything you say and do. If a comment is shared in honesty, it must be received and not shot down because it makes you feel uncomfortable.

Participate. You must verbally and physically participate in dialogue and activity times even if you are uncomfortable participating. Your willingness to do and say things that you would not normally do or say will open up others to trusting you. There are no right or wrong answers.

Get Outside the Box. You must be willing to get outside the box for the rest of the retreat and stretch the limits of your comfort zone. Lead by example.

Be Respectful. Remember that we all respond and listen in different ways based on our upbringing. Do not be disrespectful in any way throughout our time together. If we are to communicate, we must be willing to hear and listen to what others are saying and value their statements as a gift.

No Cell Phones. It's important to focus this weekend. Leave the texting and talking behind. It will still be there for you at the end of the weekend.

Respond Appropriately. If statements are shared with emotion, an appropriate response to emotion is to put a hand on that person's back.

Keep the Trust. Whatever is shared here remains here. Nothing is to leave here. Information is not power and should not be treated as such. In our work to unite, a natural part of this weekend will be a connection made with others who are here, which is based on trust. Trust is built through information and should not be broken when one person views information as power and begins to gossip.

This retreat can be exactly what you want it to be. The main goal for this retreat is twofold. The first goal is to grow deeper in your relationship with God. The second goal is to grow deeper in your relationships with others. No matter how awesome your relationship is with the Lord, there's always more. No matter how many incredible and deep friendships you have, there are always new friends to make and new depths for your relationships.

We're going to take an honest look at where we are at, challenge ourselves to go deeper, and begin to set some goals for ourselves to maintain growth.

During this retreat, you're probably going to experience some emotional mountaintop moments with God and even in your relationships with others. These moments are great, but we want to give you tools to help you sustain your growth beyond the emotional highs.

It's our prayer that we all take a step deeper in our relationship with the Lord and in our relationships with each other.





Game Suggestions

Suggested Group Games

True Colors: A board game for three or more players. See how well your girls know each other by playing a game of *True Colors*. After reading the descriptions on the cards, players secretly vote on who the description best represents. Examples of descriptions include, "Who is most likely to be seen at an airport watching their plane take off after arriving too late?"

Cranium: Tap into the talents of all your girls by playing this group board game. *Cranium* allows players to show off their artistic, musical, and acting skills as well as their spelling and knowledge of vocabulary and facts. This game depends on a variety of interests and talents and allows for some individual participation and some group participation. Best played with teams to include more people.

Apples to Apples: This game can be as silly or as practical as the girls want to make it. Players each get a handful of cards with nouns on them that they must choose from and anonymously play the one they think best fits with the describing word card the "referee" for that round has drawn. If the referee for that round has a sense of humor, players might learn to put down ridiculous cards when it is that person's turn. The referee chooses from the played cards which noun best fits with the describing card she has drawn.

Guessures: Have a group of girls that love to act? This game will be perfect for them! Divide girls into two or three teams. Each team takes turns silently acting out the word on the four different cards before the card drops out of reach or the timer runs out. Cards come in two levels of difficulty.

Spoons: This game is played with a simple deck of playing cards and a spoon for all players except for one. Dealer deals 4 cards to each player then begins to pass one card at a time to her right. Players discard either from her hand or the card she draws from the deck so she only has four cards in her hand at a time. A player wins when she has four of one suit (four hearts, four spades, etc.). When a player has four of one suit, she grabs for a spoon that has been arranged in the center of the circle of players. As other players begin to notice that a spoon has been taken they must all reach for a spoon as well. The person who ends the game without a spoon is out, and one spoon is taken away from the center.

Scene It: Have access to a television and a DVD player? Choose the right *Scene It* theme that works best for your girls and have a blast with this DVD trivia game.

Wii: Interactive video games like *Wii Sports* or *Mario Kart* can also be fun for girls.





Craft Suggestions

T-Shirt Scarf: Girls can make an adorable scarf using an XL T-shirt and scissors. Read the directions at: <http://www.favecrafts.com/Wearable-Crafts/Knotted-T-Shirt-Scarf>.

Flip Flops: Have each girl bring a pair of flip flops that they will decorate. Provide a few fabric options and scissors. Have the girls cut the fabric into 1" by 2.5" strips (or up to 5" long depending on the look they want to achieve). You may choose to cut the fabric ahead of time to preserve time. The girls will simply tie and knot the strips of fabric around the straps of the flip flops until the straps of both flip flops are covered — about 30-40 strips for each girl, depending on the size of the flip flop.

Designing T-Shirts: Have the girls bring a T-shirt to decorate. Provide puff paint, fabric markers, etc., so girls can let their creativity fly and create T-shirts they can wear the rest of the weekend and to serve as a reminder of the amazing time they had. Consider turning it into a T-shirt contest where you instruct the girls to decorate their shirts according to the Teen Girl Retreat theme, *Letters to Myself*.

Bath Salts: Search online for recipes to make bath salts. Buy the supplies in bulk and have the girls follow the recipe and assemble the bath salts in a jar or container they bring. Make other craft supplies available so girls can decorate their jars. Perhaps you could buy a few packs of colorful napkins from a party store that can be torn into pieces and decouped onto the jars.

Flower Pens: Using plain ballpoint stick pens, green floral tape, and an assortment of artificial flowers, girls can create their own flower pen. Secure the flower head to the top of the pen using a hot glue gun. Use the green floral tape to cover the stick pen to create a "stem" for the flower. If you have extra time and extra budget, let the girls create a few pens and even paint a tall, narrow vase to hold the flower pens.

Decoupage Bangle Bracelets: Buy several packs of brightly colored napkins (floral, patterned, etc.) and plastic bangle bracelets for each girl. Let the girls decorate their bracelets using a decoupage medium and paint brushes. Decoupage can be found at any craft store, but if you have extra glue from school, water it down a bit and you have your own homemade decoupage.

Homemade Aprons: Buy a plain apron, one for each girl, and materials the girls can use to decorate. Consider buying a yard or two of discounted fabric and either cut flower shapes ahead of time the girls can use to just assemble their apron or allow the girls to cut their own. You might also provide fabric or puff paint, gems and jewels, buttons, ribbons, etc. Make hot glue guns and craft glue available to speed up the process.





choose a side

This activity will allow your girls to reflect on what they believe through a series of "agree" or "disagree" questions. It will be a visual way for girls to see where their peers stand and will allow you to engage your girls in conversation as you give them a chance to defend their answers. Here are a few suggested questions. Feel free to create your own!

Instructions: Choose a long wall. On the left side, post a sign that says "Agree." In the middle of the wall, post a sign that says, "Undecided." And on the right side of the wall, post a sign that says "Disagree" to create a sliding scale. As you read each question, give the girls a chance to stand somewhere along the scale you created on the wall that best represents how they feel about the statement. After the girls have found their places, ask a few of them to share why they "voted" they way they did.

When I'm faced with peer pressure, I tend to give in. Agree or disagree?

I feel comfortable telling people about my relationship with God. Agree or disagree?

I have taken time to think about my testimony. Agree or disagree?

I lead a relatively emotionally stable life without a lot of lows and highs. Agree or disagree?

My relationship with my parents can be described as great. Agree or disagree?

My mom and I can talk just about anything. Agree or disagree?

I know what I'm going to do after high school. Agree or disagree?

It's hard for me to resist the temptations I'm faced with at school. Agree or disagree?

I have a core group of Christian friends. Agree or disagree?

I believe there is absolute truth. Agree or disagree?

Sometimes I really struggle with a low self-esteem. Agree or disagree?

I am a team player. Agree or disagree?

I am careful to moderate the kinds of movies I watch, music I listen to, and magazines I read. Agree or disagree?

I respect my parents. Agree or disagree?

I think I walk the talk. Agree or disagree?

My friends know they can trust me. Agree or disagree?

I feel like I know what I'm good at. Agree or disagree?





Letters to Myself

divine . delight . defeat . desires

attributes list

How often do you find yourself focusing on the things you wish you could change about yourself instead of the amazing attributes God gave you? Take some time to think about all of the different attributes you like about yourself. They can be physical attributes

or attributes about your personality that you like. In the other column, make a list of attributes you don't like about yourself but can't change. At the end, your leader will guide you in prayer time as you ask God to help you see yourself through His eyes — the beautiful, precious, daughter of God.

attributes i like

attributes i can't change





letter to myself

Give yourself advice. Write a letter to yourself at a significant time in your life growing up, answering some of the following questions:

1. What would you tell yourself to watch out for? 2. How would you encourage yourself? 3. What advice do you have now that you could give yourself back then? 4. How can you use this information to encourage someone in your life now? When you are finished with your letter, fold it up and put it in your covered box.

dear _____,





dreams & desires

What are your dreams and desires? What have you always wanted to do or have recently developed an interest in doing? Do you have a special set of skills or a talent that you could see God using to do amazing things with? Take a few minutes to be quiet and dream. Write about what you are thinking about.



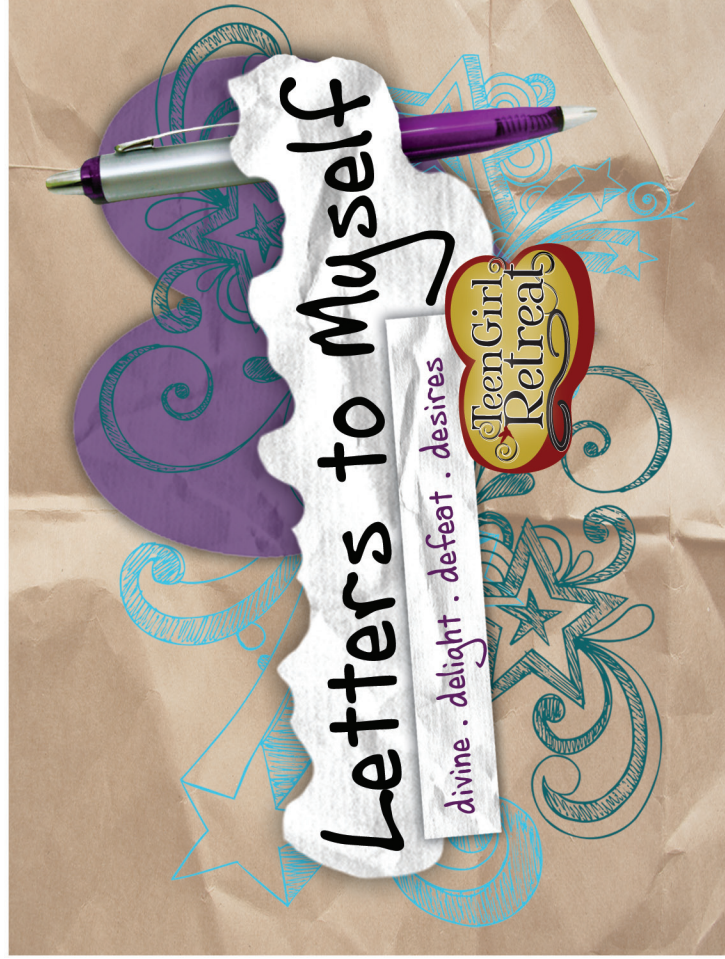
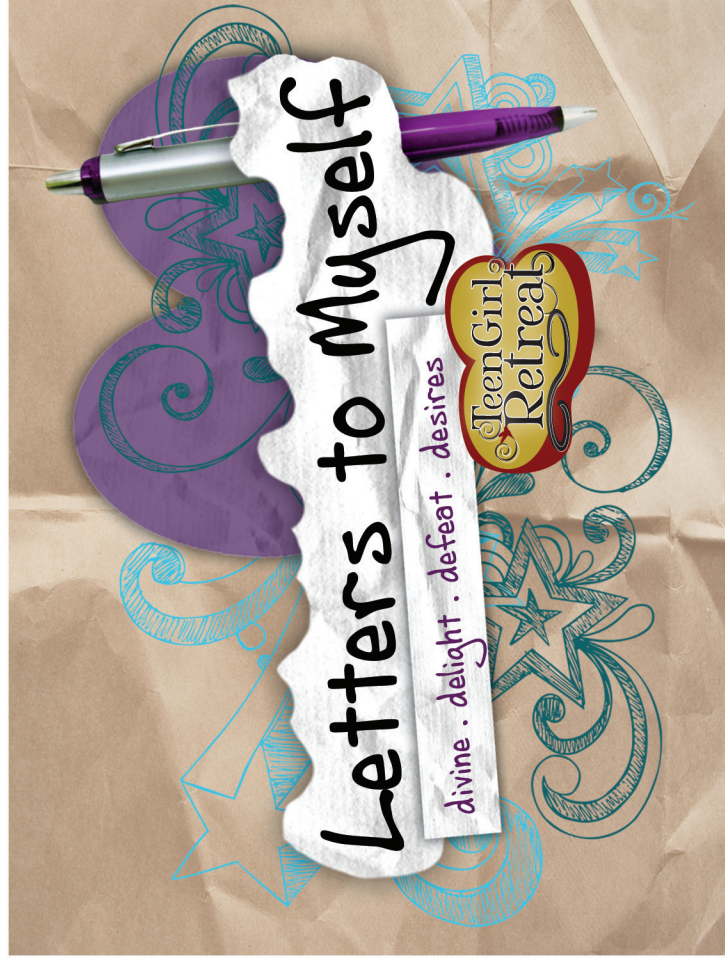
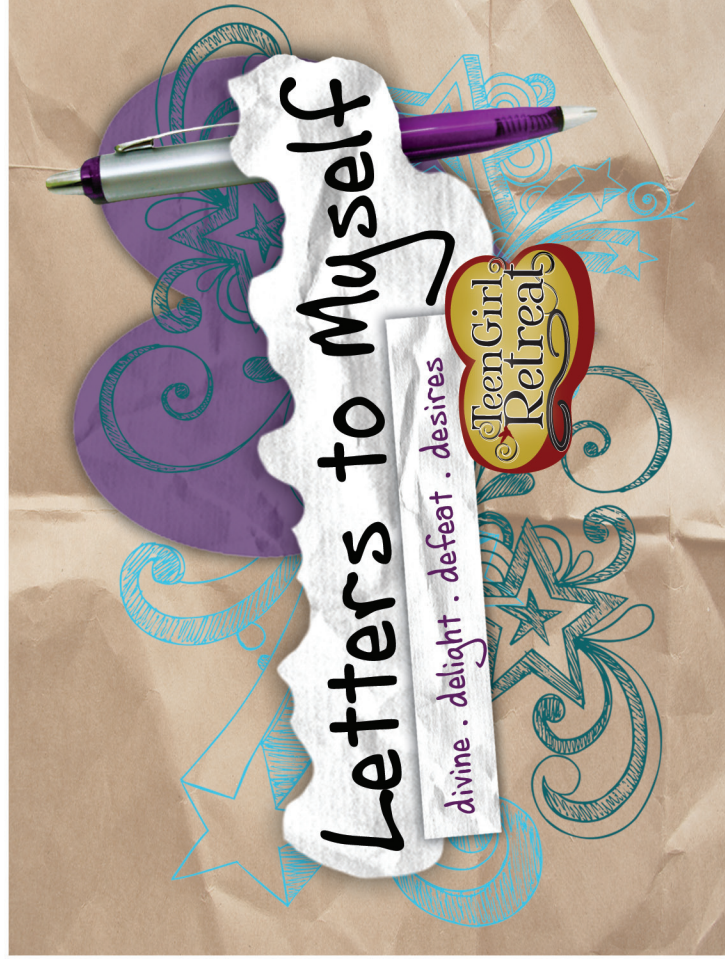
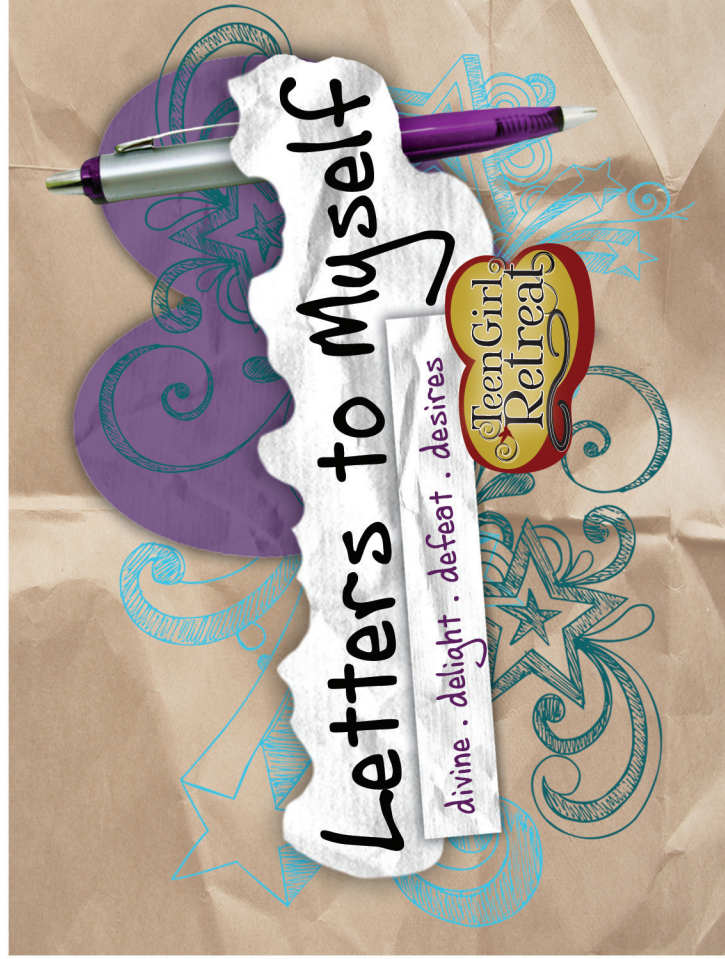


goal setting

Now that you've taken a close, honest look at where you're at, it's time to decide where you want to go from here. Take time to answer these questions. Pray about your answers and be as honest as possible. Feel free to use the back if you need more room.

1. What are some specific things you'd like to change about your relationship with God?
2. What are some specific things you'd like to change about your relationship with your family?
3. What are some specific things you'd like to change about your relationship with your friends?
4. What are some words you'd like people to use when they describe you? What changes can you make to have those words be true of you?







you are invited...

what: _____

when: _____

where: _____

r.s.v.p.: _____

Letters to Myself
live · delight · detect · discuss
Penning
Retreats

you are invited...

what: _____

when: _____

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Letters to Myself
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Letters to Myself
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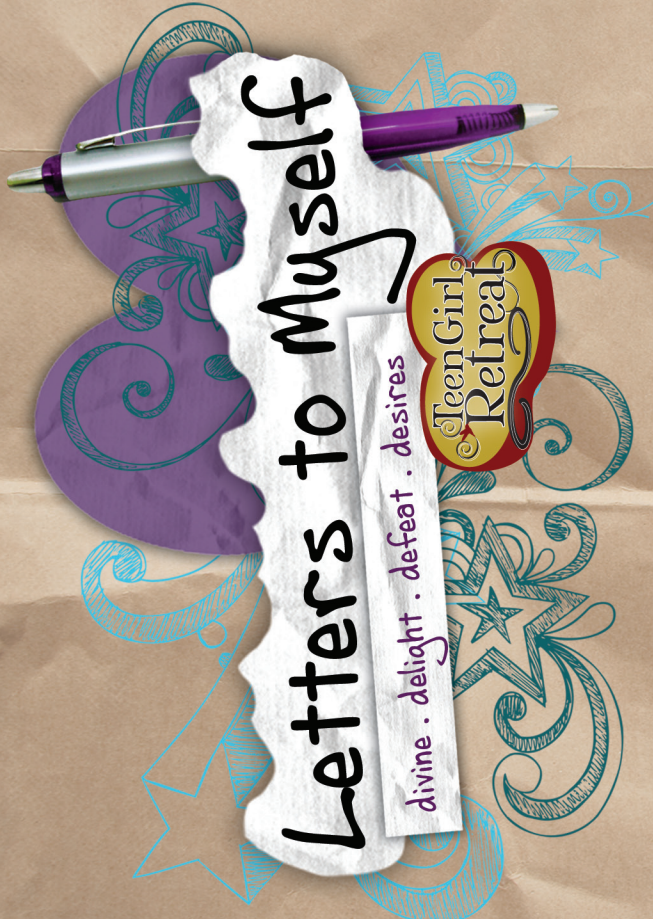
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Letters to Myself
live · delight · detect · discuss
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Letters to Myself

divine . delight . defeat . desires

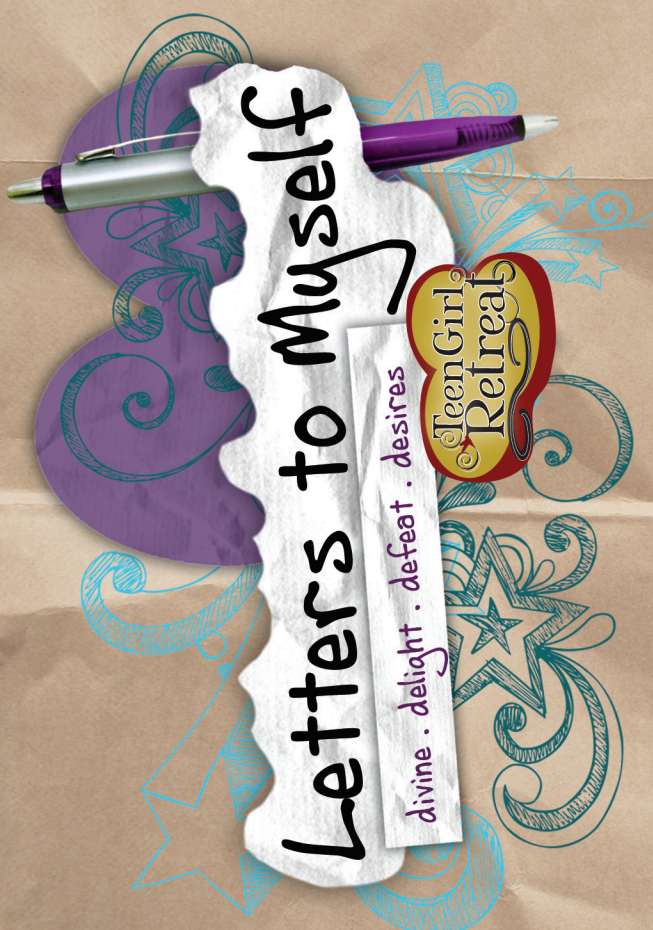
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Letters to Myself

divine . delight . defeat . desires

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Letters to Myself

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