

Centering Prayer

God's first word is silence. Thomas Keating

Psalm 46:10 *Be still, and know that I am God.*

Psalm 62: 1 *My soul waits in silence for God only; from Him is my salvation.*

1st Kings 19:11-12 *Then (Elijah) was told, "Go, stand on the mountain at attention before God. God will pass by." A hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before God, but God wasn't to be found in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but God wasn't in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper.*

Matthew 11:28-30 *"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."* **Jesus of Nazareth**

The Goal of Centering Prayer:

- to bring us to a state of inner stillness before the Lord, trusting that in this stillness – in this communion with the Lord – we will be changed; He will work on our hearts.
- to be attentive to the presence of God within...centering all your attention and desire on Him...not like meditation where the goal is to empty yourself.
- to learn to consent to and dwell in God's presence, so that the fruit of this indwelling shows up in everyday life.
- not to get a word from God or any sort of divine revelation or experience...although experiences may occasionally happen.

The History of Centering Prayer:

Centering Prayer finds its origins with the early Desert Fathers. It is first described as a form of contemplative prayer in the 4th-century writings of the monk John Cassian (AD 360-430). A Romanian, Cassian made a 20-year pilgrimage into the desert, then later founded a monastery for men, then women, in France. He wrote of this practice that he learned from the Desert Fathers as a prayer focusing on inner freedom of the soul, listening to God, and becoming conscious of the indwelling presence of God. He encouraged his monks to start with a simple prayer: "O God come to my assistance; Lord, make haste to help me." Centuries later, disciples were encouraged to gather all this desire into one simple word, one that is meaningful, that represents God in all His fullness and nothing less. Some have likened it to a meditative mantra; but the focus here is not the word, but the presence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In truth, there is no secret sauce to becoming a Christ-centered contemplative. Caring for your soul begins and ends by taking intentional steps in your busy life, finding time in your hectic schedule to step out of the traffic, disciplining yourself to come to a quiet place with God. Over the centuries, the simple practice of Centering Prayer has become the "go to" tool for anyone who desires to draw closer to God's loving presence. So, with your kind permission, allow us to give you some helpful tips on developing the tool of Centering Prayer in your life.

The Key Steps in Centering Prayer: We'll begin by acknowledging (taking note of) where you are in 1) your physical body (sensations); 2) your head (thoughts); and 3) your heart (emotions/feelings).

First, invite your body to a relaxed attentiveness. Sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor, shoes off if you like. Keep your back straight; assuming an open posture. Don't sit so comfortably to encourage sleep, but comfortable enough to avoid being distracted with discomfort of your body during this time of prayer. Place your hands palms up on your lap. Take several deep slow breaths in and out, breathing from the belly. Notice any tension or physical sensations in your body. Wiggle the muscles of the places in your body where you feel tension....and just breathe. Notice the pace and the depth of your breathing. If

you're taking short, quick breaths, try to intentionally slow your breathing down by taking deeper, slower breaths.

Secondly, invite your mind to take a "thinking" break. Close your eyes. Let go of all thoughts that come into your mind. Rest in the love of God who dwells within. As you sit in silence, it's very likely your mind will wander. Truthfully, it's this frustration with our countless thoughts and rabbit trails of the mind that discourage many from continuing in Centering Prayer.

Thirdly, invite your feelings/emotions into a peaceful calmness. Are you tired and weary, anxious or worried? Are you feeling happy and contented, or light and bubbly? As you know, there is a wide range of emotions or feelings that can come our way in the span of just one day alone. Just as you have invited yourself to take a "thinking" break, also invite your emotions/feelings to enter into a peaceful calmness so God's presence can prevail.

Now, that you've checked in with your body (sensations), your head (thoughts) and your heart (emotions/feelings), acknowledge that they are a part of you, but do not define you. They can be what and where they are, and as you give an internal gesture of gratitude for each of these parts of you, you are now free to withdraw your attention from them and onto the presence of God.

Use of a Sacred Word or Phrase. Choose a sacred word or short phrase as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. The word or phrase should communicate God's love to you. Examples might include a sacred word such as Lord, Abba, Father, Peace, Faith, Hope, or Love. You might use the name of Jesus or one of the many descriptive names for God found in the Bible. A short biblical text can serve you as well here as you use this centering word or phrase as your "come-back-to" point when you find yourself distracted. Once you've chosen your word or phrase, we suggest not changing it during your prayer period...that's simply too much thinking! Gently combine your word or phrase with your slow breathing, and as distracting thoughts and feelings subside and you become restfully aware, you can simply let go of your word or phrase, just relaxing and being in the stillness with God. Keep in mind, that if words or phrases are too distracting, some simply "listen" for the rhythm of your own breathing, returning to that rhythm when they find themselves distracted or losing focus.

Resist no distractions. Retain no distractions. Simply return to your breath or sacred word. When distracted by physical interruptions, thoughts or feelings (notice it's *when*, not *if*), your goal is to take each physical interruption, thought, or feeling and choose intentionally to set it aside. You are not trying to empty yourself, nor are you attempting to perfect yourself by having no distractions, but much like the fisherman who knows the art of "catch and release," your discipline here is to take each interruption captive and not allow it to cause you to quit or give up. One young student in centering prayer was complaining to her teacher about the thousand thoughts and feelings that distracted her while she was practicing her discipline. The master responded, saying gently, "Oh my friend, not a thousand distractions but simply a thousand opportunities to turn your mind back to Jesus!"

Invite yourself and Jesus to sit together in intentional silence. It's been said that intentional silence is at the core of all human transformation. Now, you have moved from "doing" to "being." Note that Centering Prayer is not intercessory prayer, nor is it petitioning God for your needs. In fact, no words are spoken at all. If possible, try to practice Centering Prayer for 20 minutes daily. A timer and other aids can be uploaded for free: [Centering Prayer App by Contemplative Outreach Ltd.](#) Give yourself much grace. At first, this will feel extremely foreign and contrived. Be patient and give the process both time and practice. In the end, it is well worth it, as you descend into deep quiet where the still, small voice of God can be heard.

The only way to fail at Centering Prayer is to get up and walk out! Joe Stabile

After your time in silence, slowly open your eyes and observe your space around you. Close by thanking God for the time you've had together in His Divine Presence. Invite Jesus to walk with you throughout the remainder of your day, welcoming the indwelling and empowering work of the Holy Spirit to lead the way. Go now, and live for the greater glory of God, Amen.

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