

PAUSE & PRACTICE

Centering Prayer



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PAUSE & PONDER

“But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your God in secret. And your God, who sees in secret, will reward you.”
Matthew 6:

“Centering Prayer is prayer done completely with the gesture of opening, softening, yielding ... It is not about getting rid of thoughts, but practicing the gesture of letting go. All distractions are taking you toward God... if you let them go.” - Cynthia Bourgeault

PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION

- What are your experiences with silent prayer or meditation? What does having an attitude of “consenting to the Presence of God within” mean to you?
- Here is guidance summarized from Cynthia Bourgeault’s book: *Centering Prayer & Inner Awakening*: Make sure you are comfortable; sitting upright is best but if your physical needs demand, do what you need to do to be comfortable. Close your eyes. You might like to begin your session with a short invocation, chant or prayer that reminds you of your intention to be fully open and present to the Divine. You might like to take 2-3 deep breaths.
- Centering Prayer is simple yet challenging. What call might you be hearing to a practice of Centering Prayer?



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By Janice MacLean

I tried to meditate. It ended in frustration. I'd give up when my chattering mind refused to cooperate with my desire for silence. Then I discovered Centering Prayer. It is different.

Fr. Thomas Keating cofounded the centring prayer movement. He says it is "a very simple method in which we open ourselves to God and consent to God's presence in us and God's actions with us It is like two friends sitting in silence, just being in each other's presence."

We consent to God's presence and action within us. Our desire for this does not convince our thinking mind to relax and rest, and so as thoughts and sensations rise, we let them go. We notice them, and let them go. In this way Centering Prayer differs from other forms of meditation practice: we don't concentrate on anything, we don't try to empty the mind or stop our thinking, we simply notice when we are caught in thought, and let it go. This gesture of release, of surrender, of consent, returns us to our intention of consent to God's presence.

To help us with this gesture of letting go, we choose a sacred word as a symbol of our intention. The word is one or two syllables and chosen, not because of its inherent meaning, but because of the meaning we give it as the expression of our intention to consent. Eg. Love, Peace, Mercy, Let Go, God, Abba, Jesus, Trust. For some, a simple inward glance toward the Divine Presence, or noticing one's breath may be more suitable.

When we notice a thought, rather than engage it, we turn gently to our sacred word, returning us to our intention. The word is not repeated constantly, simply turned to when we notice we are distracted. At the end of the prayer we sit quietly for a couple of minutes, so that we might bring the atmosphere of silence into our day.

If you are new to this prayer, take a few quiet minutes now and in prayer ask for a "word" that you will use today as your sacred word, your "spiritual string around your finger" that will be there when you find yourself distracted.

- Sit comfortably with your eyes closed, relax, and quiet yourself.
- Let your sacred word be gently present as your symbol of your sincere intention to be in the God's presence and open to God's divine action within you
- Whenever you become aware of anything (thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, associations), simply return to your sacred word, your anchor.
- At the end of your prayer, sit for a moment before taking your prayer into the day.

Centering is a journey that uses our distractions to take us toward God, letting our thoughts come and letting them go.