

CENTERING PRAYER GUIDELINES

We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. In the Christian tradition Contemplative Prayer is considered to be the pure gift of God. It is the opening of mind and heart—our whole being—to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Through grace we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing – closer than consciousness itself.

Centering Prayer is a method designed to facilitate the development of Contemplative Prayer by preparing our faculties to receive this gift. It is an attempt to present the teaching of earlier times in an updated form. Centering Prayer is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer: rather it casts a new light and depth of meaning on them. It is at the same time a relationship with God and a discipline to foster that relationship. This method of prayer is a movement beyond conversation with Christ to communion with Him.

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
 - a. The sacred word expresses our intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
 - b. The sacred word is chosen during a brief period of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to inspire us with one that is especially suitable for us. Examples: God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen. Other possibilities: Love, Peace, Mercy, Listen, Let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust, Yes.
 - c. Instead of a sacred word a simple inward glance toward the Divine Presence or noticing one's breath may be more suitable for some persons. The same guidelines apply to these symbols as to the sacred word.
 - d. The sacred word is sacred not because of its inherent meaning but because of the meaning we give it as the expression of our intention and consent.
 - e. Having chosen a sacred word, we do not change it during the prayer period because that would be to start thinking again.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
 - a. "Sitting comfortably" means relatively comfortably so as not to encourage sleep during the time of prayer.
 - b. Whatever sitting position we choose, we keep the back straight.
 - c. We close our eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around and within us.
 - d. We introduce the sacred word inwardly as gently as laying a feather on a piece of absorbent cotton.
 - e. Should we fall asleep upon awakening we continue the prayer.
3. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

- a. "Thoughts" is an umbrella term for every perception, including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries, and spiritual experiences.
 - b. Thoughts are an inevitable, integral and normal part of Centering Prayer.
 - c. By "returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word" a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of Centering Prayer.
 - d. During the course of Centering Prayer, the sacred word may become vague or disappear.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.
 - a. The additional 2 minutes enables us to bring the atmosphere of silence into everyday life.
 - b. If this prayer is done in a group, the leader may slowly recite a prayer such as the Lord's Prayer while the others listen.

Some Practical Points

1. The minimum time for this prayer is 20 minutes. Two periods are recommended each day, one first thing in the morning and the other in the afternoon or early evening. With practice the time may be extended to 30 minutes or longer.
2. The end of the prayer period can be indicated by a timer which does not have an audible ticking or loud sound when it goes off. [The timer is really essential. How can you rest in God if you're wondering when your time is up? A little digital timer that counts down from a set time and that emits a soft tone or beep, sets you free from thinking about time when the goal is not to think at all.]
3. Possible physical symptoms during the prayer:
 - a. We may notice slight pains, itches, or twitches in various parts of the body or a generalized sense of restlessness. These are usually due to the untying of emotional knots in the body.
 - b. We may notice heaviness or lightness in our extremities. This is usually due to a deep level of spiritual attentiveness.
 - c. In all cases we pay no attention and ever- so-gently return to the sacred word.
4. The principal fruits of the prayer are experienced in daily life and not during the prayer period.
5. Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence.