

## **CENTERING PRAYER**

### **What Is Centering Prayer?**

1. Centering prayer is an ancient prayer practice that has its roots with the desert fathers of the first few centuries. More recently, Father Thomas Keating is credited with fostering the resurgence of centering prayer. In the early 1980's, Keating began widely teaching the practice and creating spaces and support for people to incorporate this type of contemplative prayer in their everyday lives.
2. Centering prayer is a way to be present to God in a manner beyond your words, thoughts and emotions. It is a prayer of silence, without words or thoughts, with the aim of putting your whole self in a posture of trusting openness to the presence of God.
3. Thomas Keating referred to centering prayer as a prayer of intention—to offer to God our intention to be totally open to Him. We are telling God that we desire to really “be here” with Him—to show up and be available to Him, available at the deepest levels, down below our thoughts, feelings, memories, desires, even our usual psychological sense of self. Centering prayer is about the movement from communication with Christ toward communion with Christ.
4. Centering prayer is an experience of surrender or letting go. It is not an attempt to empty your mind of all thoughts. Centering prayer recognizes your thoughts and whatever is going on internally within you, and gently releases them to God. You're not trying to rid your internal world of all its occupants, you're simply detaching yourself from them for a short period of time, to be more present to God.
5. Detaching or not engaging your thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, does take some effort on your part. It is a discipline. What you are aiming for is to not give attention to whatever surfaces.
6. Author, Cynthia Bourgeault, describes a basic law of consciousness as: whatever you pay attention to, you energize; whatever you withdraw attention from, will eventually subside. So, as you sit in silence, you will notice thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and your response is to simply not engage with any of them.

7. You may not sense anything special or even positive going on while you are in the midst of centering prayer. You may not feel particularly peaceful or even centered. Centering prayer workshop leader, Sister Lorita at the Mercy Center, said she simply feels herself letting go. That's it. The benefits will be noticed later, either as you continue on with your devotional time following centering prayer or go about your day or perhaps over time, as you continue to practice centering prayer on a regular basis. You notice yourself being a bit more patient or less stressed. You feel more rooted and grounded in the love of Christ.

## **Instructions**

### **Sacred Word**

¥ The way to detach from your thoughts and emotions is by using a sacred word.

There is no one right word or word that is inherently sacred. The word becomes sacred when it represents your intent to be totally open to God. So, select a sacred word that symbolizes your intent to surrender to the presence of God.

¥ It could be a devotional or religious word such as Jesus, Holy Spirit or Abba. It could be a short phrase, such as "let go," "be here." Short is better than long. Simple is better than fancy.

¥ You can pick one word that you use every time you do centering prayer. Or you can pick a new one for each session. It is however suggested that you don't change your word in the middle of a prayer session. Whenever you find yourself thinking about something, the word jogs your memory to let go of the thought and return to your intent to be fully present to God.

¥ The word is not a mantra, in that you are not repeating it continuously. You only use it when you find yourself attracted to a thought.

### **Prayer Steps**

¥ Begin by sitting comfortably. You want to be relaxed but alert. Find a position that is not going to be distracting, either because you're uncomfortable or because you're too sleepy.

¥ Then before you enter into centering prayer, invite the Holy Spirit to lead you into the presence of God and help you select your sacred word.

¥ Set a timer or use the Centering Prayer app\* to begin your prayer time. Start by praying your sacred word as a symbol of your willingness to consent to the presence and action of God in this time of prayer.

¥ Any time you find yourself attaching to a thought, feeling or physical sensation, simply pray your sacred word again. Don't worry about how many times you find yourself using your sacred word. Think of this time as a "no judgment zone." If you have to sneeze, cough, scratch, go ahead and then return to prayer. If you fall asleep, just return to centering prayer through your sacred word when you wake up.

¥ If you are using the App after the timer goes off (or after about 20 minutes), spend a few more moments in silence, followed by a closing liturgy such as the Lord's Prayer.

Thank you to Sharon Wada of Sustainable Faith for this compilation of Centering Prayer information and instructions.