

## Centering Prayer

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

Centering Prayer is a method of contemplative prayer which has no goal other than to offer our self to God and consent to God’s presence and work within us. Centering Prayer is a spiritual practice of intentional silence, in which we let go not only of the noise and sounds of the outside world, but seek also to let go of the “inner noise” of our mind’s wandering thoughts. Centering prayer invites us to contemplation: communion with God beyond thoughts, words, emotions, sense experiences, or acts. Contemplation is not something exotic and unattainable. It is simply seeing with the eyes of the heart – from our spiritual awareness and its perspective of oneness. “In essence, contemplative prayer is simply a wordless, trusting opening of self to the divine presence. Far from being advanced, it is about the simplest form of prayer there is.” (Cynthia Bourgeault, p. 5) Contemplative prayer awakens us to our union with God, with others, and with all of creation.

The method is very simple:

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within. (examples: God, love, peace, Jesus, trust, being . . .)
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly [then] silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts ([“thoughts” include] body sensations, feelings, images, and concepts), return ever-so-gently to the sacred word. Don’t say the word continuously.
4. At the end of the prayer period (20-30 minutes), remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

*Guidelines from Thomas Keating: Contemplative Outreach*

In Centering Prayer we have no agenda except to be present and available to God. Our purpose isn’t to have an experience or to make anything happen. God is already with us. We simply want to be present to God and to give ourselves to God in love.

This intention is the point of Centering Prayer. If we spend the whole time gently returning to the sacred word when we find ourselves kidnapped by our thoughts, reaffirming our desire to surrender all else and simply be present to God, this is worthwhile prayer indeed. Often we don’t have a felt sense of God or of communication with God during the prayer time itself. These are happening beneath our ordinary awareness. But we see the fruits of the prayer in our daily life: growth in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and so on.

Prayer that fosters intentional silence nurtures spiritual awakening: God transforming us into the image of Christ. We are invited by God to ever deeper communion with God, with others, and with the world. Centering prayer is a way of saying “yes” to God’s invitation.

“What goes on in those silent depths during the time of Centering Prayer is no one’s business, not even your own; it is between your innermost being and God; that place where, as St. Augustine once said, ‘God is closer to your soul than you are yourself.’ Your own subjective experience of the prayer may be that nothing happened – except for the more-or-less continuous motion of letting go of thoughts. But in the depths of your being, in fact, plenty has been going on, and things are quietly but firmly being rearranged. That interior rearrangement – or to give it its rightful name, that interior *awakening* – is the real business of Centering Prayer” (Bourgeault, p 6).

***For further information:***

*Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening, by Cynthia Bourgeault*

*Open Mind, Open Heart, by Thomas Keating*

*Contemplative Outreach: an organization devoted to the teaching of Centering Prayer:*  
[www.contemplativeoutreach.org](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org)

Kairos School of Spiritual Formation Centering Prayer Groups

[www.on-the-journey.org](http://www.on-the-journey.org)

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