



Centering Prayer

Our Need for Silence and Solitude

We live in a hyper-connected world where technology constantly clamors for our attention. Silence and solitude are scarce as we are surrounded by noise and input from our culture. However, our souls do not flourish in such an environment — Scripture and the experience of many reveal to us that silence and solitude are necessary in order for our souls to thrive.

Even though Jesus lived in a low-tech culture, we see him intentionally and regularly seclude himself in order to be alone with God. Jesus spent 40 days in solitude in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-2). He woke up early in the morning to be alone in prayer, and spent the night praying on a mountainside before choosing His disciples (Mark 1:35-39, Luke 6:12-16). Jesus spent time alone in times of pain as well — when he heard about the beheading of John the Baptist, and on the eve of His crucifixion (Matthew 14:13, Mark 14:32-36). Pastor Michael John Cusick says, “We cannot escape the fact that in the midst of painful emotions, major decisions, and unthinkable circumstances, even Jesus needed to make space for his soul, allowing the Father to grasp Him.”

Being with God

We often think of prayer as time where we will say something to God and actively engage in a conversation with Him. However, the ancient discipline of prayer contains another aspect: silence. Centering prayer is simply about being with God, recognizing His Presence and being quiet with Him. It is about being present with The Presence! In any relationship, a mark of true depth and intimacy is the ability to be with each other in silence. Silence is an outflow of intimacy, and as stated by rabbis in the past, “silence is God’s first language.”

The Bible repeatedly affirms that as followers of Jesus, God dwells in our “inmost being” and we are in union with Him (2 Peter 1:3-4). Jesus said that when we believe in Him, “out of us will flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:38). These verses, among many, speak to the fact that our union with Christ is not something we acquire in our disciplines as much as it is something that we become aware of. It is less like drawing water from a well with a bucket, and more like opening a faucet so the living water can flow from our inmost being.

In centering prayer, we practice silence so that we can be attentive to His presence. We open the faucet of our union with Christ as we experience intimacy with Him and His delight in us. God never intended our faith to be merely an intellectual pursuit. He has more in store for us: He intends to restore our ability to walk with Him out of our union with Him in our inmost being. To sit in the presence of the Divine Love is the single most transforming experience a person can have. Imagine what it might be like to sit in His presence, with no other goal except to be delighted in as His child. That is what He wants you to experience in centering prayer!



Practicing Centering Prayer

The goal of centering prayer is not to empty your mind until you're left with a blank slate, but rather to commune with God on a beyond-words level. As you sit in silence, you might experience Him in a tangible way, through an image or a feeling of His presence, or an intangible way, through peace in being quiet with Him. Here are four simple guidelines for centering prayer:

1. Choose a sacred word as a symbol of your desire to be present with God.
 - a. When you pray to God or think of Him, what do you call Him? The word that most easily comes to mind when you think of God is the best place to start, whether it be Jesus, Abba, Lord, or another name for God.
2. Sit comfortably in a quiet place, and set a modest goal.
 - a. Practice centering prayer in a place where you can be comfortable, alert, and free from distractions. Aim for ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes of prayer — you can always increase the amount of time as your capacity increases.
3. Be silent with the Lord, turning your attention to His presence.
 - a. If a random thought or distraction interferes, let it go. As soon as you become aware that you are distracted, simply return to your sacred word that in turn refocuses you on being aware of God's presence.
 - b. You may feel like your mind is a monkey jumping around every few seconds! Don't be discouraged — this is an opportunity to offer your attention to God. If your mind wanders 300 times in 10 minutes, you have just blessed your Father by giving Him your attention 300 times during that time frame!
4. Close in a prayer of gratitude for God's presence with you.
 - a. Thank the Lord for being with you during your time of centering prayer, and refrain from judging your time in silence.

It often takes time for people to grow accustomed to practicing centering prayer, but for those who persist, it proves to be extremely valuable and transforming. They report a greater sense of intimacy, peace, and healing in their lives, and they are less easily triggered to anxiety, frustration, distraction or despair by the things of life.

Let's take some time to be present with the most glorious, loving Presence of the world and our lives — our Heavenly Father! The time we spend with Him will never be wasted.

Relevant Scriptures

John 15:4-5 *Remain in me, as I also remain in you...*

Matthew 11:28-30 *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...*

Mark 1:35 *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up...*

Questions for Discussion

- Why are silence and solitude important in our relationship with God?
- How does centering prayer change your perspective on spending time with God?
- How could you incorporate centering prayer into your daily or weekly rhythm?



Recommended Reading

The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence

The Sacred Slow by Alicia Britt Chole

Introduction to Silence and Solitude by Ruth Haley Barton

