

Resources

Books

Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Christian Prayer Form,
by Basil Pennington (Image Books)

and

Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening
by Cynthia Bourgeault (Cowley
Publications).

Internet

Thomas Keating has an excellent web page
of information on Centering Prayer at [http://
www.thecentering.org/
centering_method.html](http://www.thecentering.org/centering_method.html)

An Introduction

Centering prayer is a contemporary name given to an ancient practice of meditation within the Christian tradition. In Centering Prayer one moves beyond words and images to a form of interior prayer beyond thoughts (however noble or pious) and the senses.

Centering Prayer is not a trick to reduce stress or reach some other self-help goal. The purpose is rather to open yourself up to the presence of the God who is both within you and who transcends you. The one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who seeks to draw you in to the very communion of the Trinity awaits inside the chambers of your heart. This form of prayer offers Christians an opportunity to follow Saint Paul's counsel "to pray without ceasing."

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Centering Prayer



*An Ancient Christian
Prayer Form*

Centering Prayer is a form of Christian prayer with roots deep within the Christian faith. Though it may seem similar to transcendental meditation or Buddhist meditation, the goal is time spent with our creator and so is animated by a very different desire and uses different techniques from meditation.

Select a Prayer Word

Centering prayer begins with finding a simple word to use in meditation. A word like “Love” or even “Agape;” “Jesus” or for those interested in the Hebrew version, “Yeshua;” or another single word that can become the symbol of your intention to open yourself up to God’s presence.

The prayer moves toward the goal of an interior prayer made with no words another can hear—just one word held in the mind to guard against other thoughts.

The short version

Dom Basil Pennington gives the most concise definition of Centering Prayer as:

Be with God within.

Use a word to stay.

Use the word to return.

Praying

Centering prayer works as follows: Once you have selected your prayer word, you will need to find a place that you can sit comfortably and without distraction for the 20 minutes of prayer time. Once seated comfortably, close your eyes and bring the word to mind, in so doing you are opening yourself up to the presence of the God who is already present and active within you.

Other thoughts or distractions will come to mind. As they do, use the thought of the word to drive away the distractions. Do not get discouraged by the initial inability to focus. Just use the word and focus on that symbol.

Continue this way for 20 minutes (a gentle-sounding timer can assist with this), then with your eyes still closed remain in silence for another minute or two, gently returning from the prayer journey.

As you begin to experience these 20 minute sessions of prayer, the experience itself will sometimes be enlightening, bringing a sense of peace, and sometimes will be frustrating and you may feel you are “not doing it right” or “accomplishing nothing.” Don’t fret. The goal is time spent with God and that goal is accomplished no matter what you may feel you gain from the experience at the time.

Many people come to experience a general feeling of “being centered” or “focused” comes if they set aside time for this type of prayer, even though the prayer time itself does not seem fruitful. But nothing comes from trying to force something to happen. This prayer form is about letting go and letting God.

Don’t try to experience peace, or a spiritual breakthrough or anything else. Just use the prayer word to keep your mind otherwise blank as you wordlessly spend time with God.

One note: Centering Prayer is not meditation on the word itself. Do not give in to endlessly contemplating the sound and meaning of the prayer word. Just say the word within yourself. The goal of Centering Prayer as with other forms of contemplative prayer is to spend time with your loving Creator. That is the whole goal.

Making the Prayer Part of Your Life

If you do find that this form of prayer fits your way of being with God, you will want to set aside two 20 minute periods a day, one in the morning, the other in the afternoon or early evening. Even if you can’t do so daily, the two sessions in one day are to be recommended.