



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

What is Centering Prayer and How Do We Do It?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZ3s9Stgt80&t=10s>

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What is Centering Prayer and how do we do it? Centering Prayer. A little prayer practice that is a dance, a relationship, and if we're faithful to it, a way of life. Centering Prayer embodies a Yes to life, a Yes to love, a Yes to transformation. A Yes to be all we were created to be. Our divine potential, embodied in this human condition, is just waiting for us to say Yes to come out. Our Yes with a totality of our being. Our human condition, including all that divine potential, also includes the false self, all our brokenness, woundedness, that most of us spend most of our time in. I may think I should be someone or think you think I should be someone, but the question is, who am I? Who did God create me to be, and who does the Divine Indwelling animate?

Through Centering Prayer, I open, not to have the answers, but to allow my question to be answered by the Divine Indwelling. It's a statement of faith, beyond reading, beyond thinking about it, because thinking that is our biggest defense mechanism against transformation. To say Yes is to practice Centering Prayer, at least in my little life. What we're going to share is a little practice that enables us to let God be God for the time being, beyond thought, beyond emotional content, beyond physical sensation. Knowing that all those things may be present, but we do not have to attend to them, just for this period of time in our day.

Centering Prayer has four very simple guidelines that I would like to share with you. Father Thomas Keating has written extensively on Centering Prayer, and you will find a multitude of resources through Contemplative Outreach's website. The four guidelines, in their simplicity, are,

1. Choose a sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word.
3. When engaged with thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the period of prayer, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

Our sacred word – or some of us may have a glance or a breath. The sacred glance or sacred breath are described in wonderful detail in David Frenette's book, *The Path of Centering Prayer*. That sacred word symbolizes our intention, our intention to say Yes to God's healing love and transformation in our lives, exactly as they are today. We choose a simple word, one or two syllables, that embodies that consent to say Yes, Yes in this moment. It shouldn't be elaborate. Yes. Love. It could be a sacred word: Jesus. Jesu. Amma. Abba. Home. Light. Peace. Now. That little word holds all of our intentionality.

Now two, sitting comfortable with eyes closed, settle briefly. Did you ever catch tadpoles when you were a child? I used to take a cup and go into the creek, but I had to let the cup of water settle on a rock to see if I got any tadpoles, because there was so much debris running down that little creek. Most of us are like that. Our lives are so fast-paced, with so much coming at us, that settling briefly allows us to settle interiorly. We're allowing the physical space to come to a rest spot. We close our eyes simply because much of what we are distracted by comes to us visually. We silently introduce that sacred word, which is just the container of our Yes.

The third guideline is the essence of the prayer. It says, when engaged with thoughts – thoughts in this prayer is an umbrella term, so it's every sensation you have that crosses that stream of awareness, your body, your emotions, your memory, your imagination, the noise next door, the noise inside, whatever is happening – let it be there. This guideline says, when you engage in the thought, so when you pick it up and start to really take it to the next level, that's when you ever-so-gently return to the sacred word. Think of being with your most beloved that you just can't wait to be with, and all of the sudden there's a party next door, and they're having fireworks and an argument breaks out and the police are called and you're totally distracted and run over to the window, can't wait to find out what's happening, and all of the sudden, a little thought comes. Oh, my beloved's in the other room. So, we're ever-so-gently just returning, sometimes over and over and over again. It does not matter.

This prayer is intentionality. It's our intention to say Yes to God. What happens when we keep our butt in the chair? That's God's problem, not yours. You just ever-so-gently return, nonviolently. We don't need any more violence within ourselves or on ourselves. Ever-so-gently return to your sacred word or your sacred symbol. At the end of your 20 minutes ... Many of us use a timer, sometimes the microwave. There are many apps on your phone. Contemplative Outreach has a nice one. A bell will ring, or your time will be up, and instead of perpetuating the constant motion by jumping up and returning in active engagement to your day, you allow a minute or two to come back into full-body awareness so that you can reengage. But the source of your activity is what is shifting.

As the transformation takes place more and more, it is the Divine Indwelling animating. You will intuitively know how to do things you did not know how to do before, beyond your wildest dreams, but not as your ego thinks they should be, but as God loves you into life, that fruition begins to be apparent. It is recommended we pray twice a day. I strongly find that to be a necessity. Twenty minutes is generally the minimum just because we're so active it takes 20 minutes to come to the chair. Without judgment, without expectation, you're doing your part. You got your butt in the chair! Now, let God be God for this relationship to flourish, that we may reacquaint ourselves with our primary language, which is silence, and that silence communicates a love beyond all understanding.

I invite you into the Centering Prayer practice by sitting down, closing your eyes, and silently, gently, introducing your sacred word. May God bless you and keep you until we meet again.