



Field Guide: Centering Prayer

Centering prayer is a method of silent prayer that prepares us to receive the gift of contemplative prayer—experiencing the presence of the Real within us, closer than breathing or thinking. Developed by Thomas Keating and others, it's based on the wisdom of the early Christian Desert Fathers and Mothers.

The Four Guidelines

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.

- Examples: Jesus, Abba, Peace, Stillness, God, Love, Silence, Faith, Trust
- Choose one meaningful word and keep it consistent
- The sacred word is not a mantra but a gentle gesture of returning to your intention

2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, silently introduce your sacred word.

- Find a comfortable, alert position
- Close your eyes to reduce distractions
- Gently introduce your sacred word like a feather settling on cotton

3. When engaged with your thoughts, return gently to your sacred word.

- "Thoughts" include all perceptions: feelings, images, memories, plans, spiritual insights
- Don't try to stop thinking—this is normal
- When you notice engagement with thoughts, gently return to your sacred word
- This gentle return is the only "activity" of centering prayer

4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple more minutes.

- This allows gradual transition back to ordinary consciousness
- You may silently pray the Lord's Prayer
- Take time opening your eyes and returning to activity

The Heart of the Practice

Centering prayer is an act of consent—opening ourselves to God's presence and action already stirring within us. This is not a technique for manufacturing spiritual experiences but a way of reorienting our lives. It's a practice of releasing: releasing our grip on control, our spiritual ambitions, the ego's endless agenda. In this releasing, we make space for God to work, to move, to transform us and the presence we bring to others and the world.