

# Centering Prayer

## What is it?

- A simple way of praying in which breath and a “prayer word” keep attention focused on God’s presence.
- Listening prayer in which all thoughts and intentions other than openness to God are set aside.
- Wasting time with God. Emptying inner clutter and chatter to create a space for being with God. Stopping activity, words, and mental processing in order to experience God with and in us.

## Why is it important?

- Healing of the spirit requires openness to God’s touch at deep levels. Receptive prayer opens a space into which God may be realized and welcomed.
- Jesus’ acts of justice, healing, and salvation flowed from his life in the Spirit. His identity as God’s Beloved was renewed and sustained through daily prayer. If Jesus needed to receive, how much more do we need to be still and be filled?
- Centering prayer reorients all dimensions of self and life around the reality of God. Life’s pieces are integrated into wholeness when held together by our still point in God.
- Centering prayer is a form of deep meditation that can create brain wave changes moving us from the level of processing/analyzing (beta) to levels of receptive, intuitive awareness (alpha and theta). Alpha and theta brain wave states are known to be particularly conducive to spiritual insights or experiences.

## Scripture Reflections

- Be still, and know that I am God! — Psalm 46:10 NRSV
- But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you — Matthew 6:6 NRSV
- Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. —Psalm 85:8 NRSV

## The Practice

1. Sit with relaxed but erect posture in a comfortable chair, both feet on the floor, hands open and receptive in your lap. Close your eyes.
2. Offer a brief prayer to state your intention to God and to ask for help and guidance. (For example: “I’m here, God. Waiting, listening, open. Empty me of fear, worry, and inner chatter. Allow me to rest and rejoice in your presence.”)
3. Use your breath to create a sense of peace and letting go into God. Breathe deeply, slowly, calmly, starting with several cleansing breaths that end in an

audible sigh. As you fill your lungs and exhale, feel the tension in your muscles—your entire body—flow out with the air. Continue to breathe in a regular, natural rhythm from your abdomen rather than your chest.

4. Focus on breathing God in, breathing all else out until you feel calm and centered.
5. Continue paying attention to your breath as you focus your body, mind, and spirit on the reality that God is present and that you are here with the intention of loving and being loved by God.
6. Listen beneath or within your breath for a prayer word (or phrase) that expresses the desires and needs of your heart in this time. Don't struggle for the word. Trust that it will arise as you continue to be still and open.
7. When you have been made aware of the prayer word or phrase, repeat it silently to yourself in rhythm with your breathing.

*Example 1*

Breathing in: Fill me....

Breathing out: ...O God

*Example 2*

Breathing in: (silence)

Breathing out: ...Peace

8. When distracting thoughts pull you from centering in God (i.e., chores, a work deadline, a friend you need to call) bring yourself back by returning to your prayer word and the rhythm of your breathing. Don't fight the thoughts so much as recognizing and letting them go as you re-center on God through your prayer word and breath.
9. When the time for prayer has elapsed, offer a brief word of thanks to God, take several more deep breaths, become aware of the room around you, move or stretch in your chair and open your eyes when you are ready.

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## **Additional Resources and Reflections**

Set a regular time and place for centering prayer. Twenty minutes is recommended, but longer or shorter time frames may be used. Experiment with five or ten minutes initially and work up to twenty minutes. Some spiritual directors suggest twenty minutes in both the morning and evening but this may not be feasible for everyone.

Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (New York: Amity House, 1986).

Ron DelBene, *The Breath of Life: A Simple Way to Pray* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1996).