

## Brief Instructions on the Ancient Practice of Centering Prayer

(Rev. Dr. Vaughan Smith, revised 10/19)

I want to share with you an ancient way of **silent** prayer that can help us to do what we see in Ps. 131, verse 2: calming and **quieting** our souls so that we *can* REST IN and RECIPROCATE God's love, like a *weaned* child on its mother chest.

This ancient way of prayer is often called **Centering Prayer**.

I try to do it every day. If you'd like more information about it, or if you'd like to do it together with me some time, please let me know.

Thomas Keating teaches Centering Prayer as 4 Guidelines: <sup>1</sup>

- 1) Choose a sacred word as the 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 as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
- 3) When you become aware of thoughts, return ever so gently to God, using the sacred word.
- 4) At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

It might be helpful for me to share how I do Centering Prayer.

I set a timer for 20 minutes. Then I say something like, "*Lord, I offer myself to you; I welcome your presence and whatever work you desire to do in me during this time.*"

Then I sit quietly. Thoughts come, but I ignore them. I just let those thoughts float in and float out of mind.

When a thought **refuses** to float on by, when I realize I'm **engaged** in any thought, I silently say my sacred word, which is *Jesus*.

I picked the name Jesus to be my sacred word because **abiding in him** is what Centering Prayer is all about. When I silently say, "*Jesus,*" I am reminding myself **who** I am supposed to be focusing on and I am inviting him to do whatever he wants in the time of prayer.

As often as my mind gets stuck on a thought, I refocus myself by silently saying my Savior's name.

When the timer goes off, I slowly pray the Lord's Prayer. That's it. It's that simple.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrasings of Keating's four guidelines here quoted are from Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 16.

Sometimes, God speaks to my heart  
or gives me an idea in Centering Prayer, but that is rare.

Sometimes, I do experience a mutual exchange of love,  
resting in and reciprocating God's love. Sometimes, I don't feel anything.

I believe that through Centering Prayer, God has increased my patience, empathy,  
restraint, and peace. I also believe that in Centering Prayer God silently gives us  
wisdom concerning upcoming issues and events.

Centering Prayer dates back at least to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which was probably  
written in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. My favorite book about this kind of silent prayer is M. Basil  
Pennington, *Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Christian Prayer Form* (New York:  
Image Books, Doubleday, 1980, 2001). Thomas Keating and William Meninger also  
have written helpful books about this kind of prayer.

I hope you will try Centering Prayer.

You might want to commit to trying for 30 days and see what happens.

We're all different.

It's possible that Centering Prayer is for not you at this point in time, and that's okay.

There are many different ways to pray  
and to **cultivate** one's relationship with God.