

Centering Prayer is Rooted in the Christian Contemplative Tradition

Pope St. Gregory the Great (circa 540 AD) summarized the Christian contemplative tradition as “resting in God”.

Prayer is a relationship with God. The method of centering prayer is entirely in the service of this relationship. What counts is our intention to rest in God’s presence, with no focus whatsoever on a particular outcome or experience.

Centering prayer is based on the wisdom saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: “When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you” Mt 6:6

The term Centering Prayer is in reference to Thomas Merton's description of contemplative prayer as prayer that is "centered entirely on the presence of God."

Centering Prayer is Trinitarian



We are humbled by the mystery of the Trinity: God who is three divine persons intimately united in a dance of love. A divine dance that we are invited into by a God who loves us beyond our imaginations, even though we may feel unworthy of that love.

We are called to participate in this dance of love by loving one another: by giving and receiving the flow of love, and through prayer-resting in God and allowing God to flow through us.

Trinitarian Spirituality

- To enter into the life of the Trinity is to give up the competition and rivalry that's been drilled into us and to go on against the grain of this culture of individualism.
- We must let go of our egos, our false selves. We don't need to prove ourselves. You are a child of God; that is your identity. You were made in the image & likeness of God: the divine image is in you.

Trinitarian Spirituality

- Prayer is an allowing of the flow of the Spirit.
- Prayer gets us back to rest in that place that already knows it is one with God.
- It is our reverent, conscious openness to God.
- God needs your “yes,” just like Mary’s *fiat* (let it be done).

Centering Prayer in Brief

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 consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts,* return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the suggested twenty minute prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

**thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections*

Centering Prayer in Greater Depth

Six Continuing Sessions of the Introduction to the Centering Prayer Practice:

1. Prayer in Secret

<https://youtu.be/W4w52bsLGrw>

2. The Discipline of Centering Prayer

<https://youtu.be/Cia6AMOEpu0>

3. What Centering Prayer is Not and What it is

<https://youtu.be/C8819hES3LY>

4. The Basic Principles of Centering Prayer

<https://youtu.be/IVLJj4EdQYk>

5. The Method of Centering Prayer - Part 1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FWvxwfN_CE&pbjreload=10

6. The Method of Centering Prayer - Part 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pX6XtDuRaqY&t=309s&pbjreload=10>

Method of Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer is 2 things

A relationship with God and

it facilitates the movement from discursive and then meditative prayer into prayer that is simply resting in God's presence, whether felt or unfelt.

Intention is everything, is what makes it prayer, completely open to God and God's loving action

Principal effects experienced not in the prayer time itself but in daily life

Some practical considerations were discussed regarding scheduling prayer periods, the mostly gentle psychological unloading that can occur during the prayer, including some physical manifestations such as itches, what to do when these are overwhelming. These can occur even when well advanced in the practice and are examples of when you may not be able to go back to your sacred word, so in these cases make the emotion itself temporarily a symbol of your intention to be completely open to God and God's loving action

Psychological Experience of Centering Prayer

Gospel itself addresses our need for psychological healing through friendship with Christ

We begin our lives from conception with the gift of the Divine Presence, and our true selves are always closely associated with the Divine Presence

However, beginning as toddlers we start forming a false sense of self in order to cope with our separateness from others, especially initially our mothers

Our spiritual awareness is our sense of self

Our ordinary awareness is where we mostly live and act and relate to others and where we focus on our programs for happiness, with a loss of a sense of the presence of God, in essence looking for happiness in all the wrong places
Life dominated by external experiences with little sense of self except in moments of particular intensity

CP is a deliberate attempt to enter into spiritual awareness, and an openness to God taking us further into God's presence

Psychological Experience of Centering Prayer (cont)

Regular practice leads to a relative lack of interest in passing thoughts and one arrives at some sense of God's presence relatively quickly in the prayer period, be it a sense of peace or consolation, etc.

A settling into a kind of rest and a consequent reduction in defense mechanisms repressing some unpleasant experiences or some type of grieving.

This rest is still on one's level of conscious ordinary awareness, but one is moving ever closer to spiritual awareness and ultimately to the Divine Presence and one's true self.

At this point some unloading may well occur in the form of primitive emotions and thoughts with no current cause, a sign that they are indeed from the unconscious. During this period of evacuation the sacred word may not help. Do not be distressed, times of evacuation go hand in hand with the consoling rest. Once completed, the evacuation provides room for the gifts of the Spirit to rush in, and one becomes a bit closer to awareness of one's true self.

This is a healing process

Psychological Experience of Centering Prayer (cont)

Even the ordinary thoughts passing by represent a very gentle unloading or evacuation of the unconscious and therefore are also a part of the healing process

Whether gentle or overwhelming, this is all the Divine Presence reaching deeper into our unconscious and providing healing by releasing harmful material, which is then simply gone, providing room for the good gifts of God

This is so very important because the motivations of the unconscious affect our actions. Unhealed, they can do much damage. This is why some of the Gospel sayings can seem harsh, like in terms of removing obstacles. One does not do this violently, however, but by letting God work within us.

The Holy Spirit's purpose in this work of the Spirit is nothing less than our eventual transformation into the Divine way of knowing and loving. This process is a gradual unloading of our “emotional junk” and making room for our own unique manifestation of the gifts and beatitudes of the Holy Spirit.

Psychological Experience of Centering Prayer (cont)

God's work in us is like that of an archeological dig, excavating material from our unconscious. Of course, with God, there is healing right along with the excavation.

Now there may be times of spiritual dryness or even apathy. St John of the Cross called this the Night of Sense, where spiritual and even sacramental activities fail to hold much of any meaning for us. This is not to mean discouragement from the practices. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit working to bring us to the next level of spiritual awareness. One often immediate fruit of this, as one passes through the Night of Sense and reaches a plateau of deeper spiritual awareness and joy in spiritual practices and the Sacraments returns, is a true compassion for others in the same boat and often an increase in compassion in general.

There may be times, analogous to St. John of the Cross term, the Night of Spirit, when God, in calling us to a new level of spiritual awareness, seems to disappear from our lives. We need to be aware that this too is part of the Divine therapy, a bringing us, little by little, to an awareness of our incredible capacity for weakness, even for evil. Do not be discouraged, you will still have a sense of being on a path, of growing in some virtue, even in the love of God, although there is no felt presence of the Divine during this period of time. In fact, God has not really gone anywhere, it is merely our attitudes that are being adjusted.

Psychological Experience of Centering Prayer (cont)

Indeed, as we spiral toward the Divine indwelling, passing through one plateau after another, finding God in a more intimate way each time, it becomes readily apparent to us that God is always present. Indeed, if we simply relax and wait on God, in our prayer periods and at other times, we will find ourselves aware of God's presence again, even from our first waking moment and throughout the day.

Accepting this process of waxing and waning is "immensely enriching" as we find God, sometimes in subtle ways. This is beyond our ordinary five senses. It is in spiritual enlightenments in our experiences, in nature, in other people. Eventually, it is a mostly constant spiritual sense of Presence, which is only strengthened by brief periods when the sense may wane.

As the centering prayer process progresses over time with regular prayer periods, the Holy Spirit helps us to save the good things from our past experiences, and even to see the good that came from the bad. Patience and persistence is key, as we wait for a "whole new level of peace, joy, and capacity to serve others".

We grow closer to Divine union, and correspondingly, we grow more and more in living the gifts and beatitudes in daily life. In other words, we manifest more and more the mind and heart of Christ to others and to the world.

Psychological Experience of Centering Prayer (cont)

As a person continues in the practice, and more and more learns to love and trust God by seeing that this Divine therapy works, so that “you are not afraid of what comes up”. Indeed, “when it doesn't matter to you what comes up, you are pretty close to Divine union at that point”

This is what “the cross of Christ really is, who we are with our wounds, and God is asking us to bear that for the love of God.....God will help us”. Wherever we are in the process, the “Christian perfection is love.....love our weaknesses and frailties.....and let that be your service of God, who has come to live with sinners”

So, as one gets to the bottom of the pile (archeological dig analogy) and may feel worse for a time as primitive emotions from very early childhood come up, rejoice, for one is near to divine union, where God has been waiting for you.

The peace which passes all understanding, with a loving acceptance of our lives, our world, and the people in them.

One now has the certain gift of knowledge, in both ones heart and will, not just head knowledge, that truly God alone can satisfy us, not the desires for power, esteem, and security that drove us in our search for happiness since early childhood. Now there may still be a measure of grieving for these things, but you now know that they are not going to work as substitutes, even as idols, for God.