

# Centering Prayer

March 2021, by Adam Marshall-Lopez

## BEFORE YOUR FIRST TIME

- Choose your Sacred Word.

Your sacred word is personal to you, but you needn't overthink it. You can change your word if you find your previous word no longer resonates. You don't want to change it mid-practice, however. Your sacred word is (in some ways) synonymous with your "intention" for your practice. The purpose of centering prayer is to sit or to rest in God's presence. Try to choose a word that connects all of that together.

- Decide your time or frequency.

Choose a goal for yourself. Customarily, Centering Prayer advocates encourage people to use centering prayer twice a day for 20 minutes a session. You may decide that once a day or every other day is more achievable for you. If you cannot stomach sitting in silence for 20 minutes, set aside no fewer than 10 minutes for a session as that will help you to get a true feel for centering prayer.

- Don't expect to "succeed."

Like many meditation practices, centering prayer is not intended to make someone a professional centering "pray-er." It is important not to judge your centering prayer session or to put a label of "good" or "bad" on it. It is said that nun approached Thomas Keating after a workshop lamenting her failure, as she'd had ten thousand thoughts in her 20-minute session. Thomas Keating allegedly responded, "How lovely! 10,000 opportunities to return to God."

## DURING YOUR PRAYER TIME

- Resist no thought
  - Retain no thought
  - React to no thought
  - Return ever so gently to the sacred word
- Physicality. Sit in a comfortable position, in a space where it is unlikely you will be disturbed. Most of your work should be internal to your mind – so eliminate as many external distractions as possible.
  - Timekeeping. Set a timer or gentle alarm to let you know when your session is over. You can begin your prayer by saying your Sacred Word in your head (if you'd like).
  - Internality. Follow the four R's above. If you find yourself "thinking" or paying attention to anything *other* than letting go ... you can recite your sacred word internally and let go of whatever has apprehended you. You will have plenty of time to practice this, and it is in the practicing that we find the point of centering prayer.

## OPTIONAL FOLLOW UP (UNTIL NEXT TIME)

- You could journal about centering prayer.

You may want to write down your breakthroughs or troubling thoughts. Sometimes writing alone provides enough space to work through those takeaways. You could even write about how you'd like to change your practice; and over time, be able to see how you've grown or changed.

- You could modify your plan.

Maybe you need to sit in a different spot. Maybe your phone rang too much. Maybe you found the traffic outside too distracting. Rather than step away from your practice in that moment, you can plan to make changes for the next time.

- You could do some extra reading.

I am an **Input** on the Strengths Finder assessment. It is no surprise that I enjoy consuming and taking in new information. If you would like to read more, you could find books by Thomas Keating, Rev. Cynthia Bouregault, or M. Basil Pennington. You could also watch some other videos on YouTube. It is more important to *practice* centering prayer than it is to understand it fully.