

Centering Prayer

Spiritual direction resource - contemplative practice

A Prayer of Consent

Centering prayer is a simple contemplative practice rooted in the Christian tradition. It is often described as a prayer of consent: a way of consenting to the presence and action of God, the Holy, or the deeper mystery of love beyond words.

Unlike discursive prayer, centering prayer is not primarily about speaking to God, analyzing experience, or producing insight. It is a practice of resting, returning, and consenting.

The Sacred Word

In centering prayer, a person usually chooses a sacred word or simple phrase as a symbol of intention. The word is not used as a mantra to force concentration. It is used gently, as a way of returning when attention becomes caught in thought, emotion, memory, planning, or self-evaluation.

The word might be “love,” “peace,” “mercy,” “here,” “trust,” “Abba,” “Spirit,” or another word that feels simple and non-demanding.

When the mind wanders, the invitation is simply to return to the sacred word with gentleness.

Not Measuring the Prayer

Centering prayer can stir the desire to measure spiritual experience: Was I peaceful? Did I feel God? Was I distracted? Did I do it right?

These questions are understandable, but they can turn prayer into performance. The fruit of centering prayer may not be obvious during the practice itself. Sometimes the fruit appears slowly: more patience, more humility, more compassion, more capacity to pause, or a less rigid hold on the self.

A Basic Practice

Sit comfortably and settle for a moment. Choose a sacred word as a symbol of your consent. Allow thoughts and sensations to come and go. When you notice that you are engaged with them, return gently to the sacred word.

Practice for a realistic amount of time. Some may begin with five minutes. Others may gradually move toward twenty. The length matters less than the spirit of gentleness and consent.

At the end, take a moment before rising. Let the transition be slow.

Closing Reflection

Centering prayer is not a way to force spiritual experience. It is a way to make space for the mystery that cannot be controlled.

The practice is simple, but not always easy: consent, return, release, and begin again.