

# Prayer Gathering One

Lent 2020  
Cooks Creek Presbyterian Church

## Contemplative Prayer

We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. In the Christian tradition contemplative prayer is considered to be the pure gift of God. It is the opening of mind and heart - our whole being - to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Through grace we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing, closer than consciousness itself.<sup>1</sup>

### I. Centering Prayer

Our focus today is centering prayer which can be thought to be the bedrock of contemplative forms of prayer. The focus of centering prayer is the deepening of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Centering prayer helps us connect to the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – on a level deeper than our words and thoughts. The more we practice it the more we find ourselves centered in who we are called to be and more aware of God in us and around us.

*Centering prayer is an opening, a response, a putting aside of all the debris that stands in the way of our being totally present to the present Lord, so that he can be present to us. It is a laying aside of thoughts, so that the heart can attend immediately to him. – M. Basil Pennington*

Centering prayer is a useful practice at any time but cultivating the rhythms of centering prayer enriches our lives especially when we find ourselves in the midst of trials, stress, anxiety, and worry. The ability to step back from the world and be centered in Christ is invaluable, especially when faced with crisis (like an emergency, illness, surgery, etc.).

Centering prayer is a way of living Jesus' words in Matthew 6:6: "But when 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."

#### Guidelines for Beginning Centering Prayer

The goal of centering prayer is to let go of everything bouncing around in your mind and spirit and be in the presence of Jesus Christ.

##### 1. Find the right setting

Find a quiet, solitary space in which you can be comfortable but not overly relaxed (don't obsess over finding the perfect space and time, go with what you've got). I'd encourage you to set a timer and then put it out of reach.

##### 2. Choose a word as your intention to let God into this time

Don't be overly concerned with the word. It can be the same word every time. Don't change the word during your session. The goal is to get rid of those thousands of thoughts and distractions and worrying about the right word is a thought and distraction! Examples: God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Amen, Love, Listen, Peace, Mercy, Let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust.

##### 3. Start your prayer time

Close your eyes. Relax your body (one body part at a time, if that helps) but not in a way that leads you to a nap. Give yourself the space to let go of all the pending tasks, tensions, stressful thoughts, and begin to rest in the love of God. A good way to do this is to focus on your breathing as you focus on the word you have chosen. As you increasingly focus on your breathing, allow everything else to subside.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the material for this page is taken from Thomas Keating at [contemplativeoutreach.org](http://contemplativeoutreach.org)

#### **4. Move deeper**

As you practice centering prayer, the word should drift away and you rest in the presence of God. This takes practice! But for now, when you find yourself wandering to other thoughts, etc., return to your word and focus on that so only the word is present. Returning to the word should be the only activity we initiate during this time.

#### **5. Closing the time**

When your timer goes off (after lots of practice, you won't need one!), turn it off and give yourself a few minutes to transition back to everyday life. A good way to close would be reciting the Lord's Prayer.

*The principle fruits of centering prayer are not experienced during the prayer time – however rich those experiences will be – but in the rest of your daily life and interactions. You will be more centered, grounded, and connected to Jesus!*

### **II. Individual Prayer Development Time**

We are spending several minutes in individual prayer. I'd encourage you *not* to spend it analyzing your centering prayer time... let that time exist as it was. Instead, reflect on these questions:

How have I experienced God in the past week?

What has God been saying to me in the past month?

What do I need to pursue in prayer this week?

### **III. Group Prayer Time**

We are closing with a time of group prayer. Before we enter that time, take a moment to reflect upon who/what should be lifted up in prayer today: