

Centering Prayer — A Missional Practice

Missional practices: cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's mission.

Purpose: To enhance awareness of God's presence and to experience God's Spirit centering, calming, and revitalizing your whole being. This missional practice encourages you to rest and find renewal in God's presence by taking moments for silence, by relaxing your body, by deep and intentionally conscious breathing, and by praying. Centering Prayer is one way to follow Jesus's example for taking time for rest and renewal to be with God and to be faithful to God's purposes.

Steps:

1. Sit in a relaxed position, comfortable to you. Close your eyes, if this helps you to focus and not be distracted.
2. Offer a brief prayer to ask for help and guidance. (For example: "I'm here, God, waiting, listening, open. Empty me of fear, worry, and inner noise. Allow me to rest and find renewal in the awareness of your presence.")
3. Use your breath to create a sense of peace and letting go into God. Breathe deeply, slowly, calmly, starting with several cleansing breaths that end in an audible sigh. As you fill your lungs and exhale, feel the tension in your muscles and your entire body flow out with the air. Continue to breathe in a regular, natural rhythm from your abdomen rather than your chest.
4. Focus on breathing God in, breathing all else out until you feel calm and centered.
5. Continue paying attention to your breath as you focus your body, mind, and spirit on the reality that God is present and that you are here with the intention of loving and being loved by God.
6. Listen beneath or within your breath for a prayer word (that may express a phrase, feeling or image) that reveals the desires, needs, or concerns of your heart. Don't struggle for the prayer word. Trust that it will arise as you continue to be still and open.
7. When you have been made aware of the prayer word, repeat it silently to yourself in rhythm with your breathing. Example:

(Breathing in) (Silence)

(Breathing out) ...my neighbor, or peace, or trust, etc.

(Breathing in) [Silence]

(Breathing out) ...my neighbor, or peace, or trust, etc.

8. When the time for prayer is over, offer a brief word of thanks to God. Take several more deep breaths.

9. If this missional practice is being done with others, become aware of those around you and trust God's presence and blessings as you share with one another.

Tips for the Process:

Imagine that Jesus is breathing in and through you as he did with his disciples. A helpful scripture to reference is John 20:19–22 NRSV:

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

When distracting thoughts pull you away from centering in God collect yourself with the rhythm of your breathing and your prayer word.

Scale into this missional practice by setting aside 5-10 minutes and then try to achieve this quiet pattern of presence in God for approximately 20 minutes.

Remembering this quote may help you to spontaneously do this missional practice throughout the day in smaller intervals:

Bidden or unbidden, God is present. — Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus