

# Centering Prayer

## Week 1

### Centering Prayer Rooted in the Teachings of Jesus

- Jesus went off on numerous occasions and spent time by himself in solitude in the desert or on the side of a mountain as part of his own spiritual relationship with God the Father.
- When his disciples asked how they should pray (Matthew 6:5-14). He instructs them first not in a prayer of words, but to enter a room and pray in secret to their father. After this, he instructs them in a prayer of words, The Lord's Prayer.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Centuries – Desert mothers and fathers formed small communities and recorded the contemplative traditions of early Christian followers. These writings are still available today on how to practice and what to do with our thoughts.

### Parable of the Young Fish

“Your view of God affects your centering prayer practice and contemplative realization. When you see God as a thing, an object outside of you, then you are always seeking to draw closer to something that is separate from you.

It is as if you are like a young fish who is told about something called water. This young fish is curious about what water is and asks the elder fish in his school, “What is water? Where can I find water?” The elder fish tells him to travel as far as he can upward and look above him. There he will see water coming towards him. So, the fish does this. He travels and swims as far as he can upward, looks above, and there in the heavens he sees drops of something coming towards him. He discovers that this is water. Water is the drops of rain coming towards him.

He is satisfied for a while, having discovered the answer to his question. Rain is water. But, what if that young fish were to discover even more fully that he lived all the time in an ocean of water? That his very being was surrounded by water and the currents and the movements of this water gave him life? What if the fish discovered even further that his very being, his body itself, is mainly liquid? So not only is water all around him in the ocean, but water is within him as the very core of his nature. Water is not just rain in a distant realm far above him. Water is also the ocean in which he lives and moves and has his being.” David Frenette

### Sacred Symbol

In this practice, the sacred symbol will be represented by a 1-2 syllable word, image, or breath. The sacred symbol is not a vehicle that gets you to God. The sacred word/breath is a symbol of your intention to consent to the presence and action of God. Consistent practice with the sacred symbol in centering prayer creates space for God to come to life in your conscious experience of prayer. You learn and relearn receptivity, an “amen” to God's presence and action in the present moment. So be it.

### **Guidelines for Centering Prayer with Sacred Word or Image (20 minutes, 2 times daily)**

1. Choose a sacred word or image as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably with eyes closed settle briefly. Silently introduce the sacred word as a symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts (which include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections), return **ever so gently** to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence for a couple of minutes to integrate this time of prayer into the rest of your life, your mind, and your heart. A bridge back to active life.

### **Guidelines for Continuous Conscious Breath (20 minutes, 2 times daily)**

Because breath is such an embodied and receptive symbol, many people are drawn to centering prayer with sacred breath at certain seasons of the spiritual journey, to help with deepening their prayer into contemplation and as a way of integrating and embodying their spiritual practice with their physical, human experience.

1. Sitting comfortably with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred breath as a symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Become aware of your breathing, notice how it feels to inhale and exhale. Now, gently inhale for about 2 seconds, and without pausing, exhale for 2 seconds. Eliminate the pause that typically comes at the end of an inhale or exhale, thus connecting your breathing pattern into one continuous sacred breath. Inhale for 2 seconds, right into an exhale for 2 seconds. Continue breathing in for 2 seconds and breathing out for 2 seconds with no pause in between.
3. When engaged with your thoughts (which include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections), return **ever so gently** to the sacred breath.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence for a couple of minutes to integrate this time of prayer into the rest of your life, your mind, and your heart. A bridge back to active life.

---

10 week series is based on David Frenette's book and audio workshop on Centering Prayer. Dave Frenette is a contemplative spiritual director, mentor for other spiritual directors, teacher, and spiritual writer. He co-created and co-led a contemplative retreat community where he lived as a monk for 10 years.

- The Path to Centering Prayer: Deepening Your Experience of God, David Frenette, 2017.
- Centering Prayer Meditations: Effortless Contemplation to Deepen Your Experience of God, David Frenette (2014, Audiobook)