

Centering Prayer Week 3

*“The Lord is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.
The Lord is good to all;
He has compassion on all He has made.”* Psalm 148.8

Being with Thoughts, Feelings, Body Sensations (Audiobook Chapter 5, 7 min)

You can spend so much energy and time trying to change the things around you (people, situations, traffic) in an effort to create peace within. This approach is kind of like taking a radio all around a house to tune in to your favorite station. You can move it all over the place; into the kitchen, the bathroom, the den, even outside, and have no impact on the perpetual static. It is only when you stop, set the radio down, and begin to gently tune the dial that you find the right radio frequency and experience resonance.

Over time and consistent practice, centering prayer develops a freer transformed relationship to everything that can happen in our mind, body, heart, and spirit.

- We learn how to be with experiences of felt distraction.
- We learn how to be with experiences of emotional turmoil.
- We learn how to be present to God at a deeper level of our being because *God is the source* of the prayer in this deep contemplative space.

Being with Difficult Thoughts, Feelings, Sensations:

1. Faithfully continue with the practice. Renewing your discipline and intentionality is very valuable at these points. Thomas Keating encourages a friendly attitude toward thoughts, feelings, and external distractions.
2. It is important not to wrestle with your thoughts. Expect them. Any emotional frustration or annoyance is more of a hindrance than any number of casual thoughts.
3. Rather than trying to run away from the resistance, open your heart and your experience. Feel into what the resistance is like in your body. Embrace God in the feeling of resistance. In centering prayer this requires great trust because it affirms that God is already with you *in all experiences and in all situations*.
4. The practice at this point is to renew your intention, *ever so gently* returning to the sacred symbol (word, breath), when you are engaged with a thought. Be willing to just feel resistant. Just feel into the felt sense of resistance in your body (i.e. the tension in your throat, tightness in your shoulders, the upset and tightening in your belly).
5. We are not trying to change anything. Just be with any experience that is arising in your mind and your body without trying to make it different and without trying to

embrace it. Just be in the being of God and trust that the flower of God's love in your heart is continually opening.

6. Falling asleep during meditation is a sign of challenging unconscious material coming to the surface. It is not necessary and may not even be possible to know what it is. Some of this experience is preverbal. Practicing continuous conscious breath at a faster pace is helpful during these times of meditation.

Resistance

“All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing compassion! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us. We have plenty of hard times that come from following the Messiah, but no more so than the good times of his healing comfort—we get a full measure of that, too.” Corinthians 1: 3-5 3-5

There is something about the human condition that embodies contraction resistance – the *illusion* of a separate sense of self that feels isolated from God. A practice of consent like centering prayer actually brings up deeper levels of resistance, not so that we are discouraged, but so we may move in and through the resistance into greater union with God. Through faithful practice within the presence of God, we experience the resistance in order for it to be fully transformed.

“Through the action of this same gentle releasing motion, it sometimes happens that painful material buried tightly in your unconscious can begin to respond to that invitation as well and surface into your consciousness during the time of the prayer in the form of painful memories, tears, or sudden emotional and physical pain.

Thomas Keating named this process a purification, or healing, of the unconscious. Typically, this will not happen to you until you are well established in your Centering Prayer practice, and even then, it usually only becomes really noticeable during retreats where you are doing three hours or more of Centering Prayer a day. At the recommended ‘dosage’ of twenty minutes twice a day, this purification is more like a gentle scrubbing and does most of its work without you noticing.” (Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Path of Centering Prayer*, 2012)

This 10 week series is based on David Frenette's book and audio workshop on Centering Prayer.

- *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)



The Guest House

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.
Be grateful for whatever comes.
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

—Rumi