

Centering Prayer Week 4



Opening and Recognizing (Audiobook Chapter 8, 1 min, Book Chapter 10)

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28

Opening

“To open” means to “untie, unwrap, reveal or receive.”

Contemplation is a receiving of the reality of God. When your hands are open, you can receive a gift someone is offering you. There are many gifts that God gives: faith, love, the ability to serve others, and the ability to pray. Life itself is a gift. Yet the greatest gift of all is God. Contemplative practice cultivates an open-handed disposition toward life and the present moment so you can receive all the great gifts God is showering upon you, including the greatest gift imaginable: God’s indwelling presence, the eternal gift toward which you orient and reorient as you progress in centering prayer.

Particular gifts come and go in life. You are invited to open to difficult things as gifts, too, and you are challenged during times of spiritual darkness not to seek any particular experiences or tangible gifts other than the subtle presence of God acting within. Having open hands is a very apt image for the spiritual journey. With open hands, you are free to receive everything. With open hands, you are also willing to let everything go. In opening to everything and letting everything go, you receive God’s presence as the supreme gift. Grace is already given. God is already here.

Recognizing

“To recognize means “to be conscious of, admit, or realize.”

God's gifting is ongoing, in all things. Recognizing the gifting is like the simple way you recognize your breath in you. Your breath is always here – otherwise you would not be alive. It was given to you at birth; you received it then, and it has sustained your life ever since. But normally you are not aware of your breathing. When you simply recognize that you are breathing, then you accept the gift of this moment of life.

Centering prayer is a response to God's scriptural invitation to "be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). You let your mind become still and quiet, intuiting the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). The contemplative knowing of God is an unknowing of any specific concept or thought, because you are the one who is being known by God. In centering prayer, God is less an object of thought than the subject who loves you. This love is not sentimental, not saccharine, but transforming. It is like a purifying flame, burning away all self-sufficient efforts to achieve anything in prayer and, at the deeper contemplative levels, even burning away every effort you make to open.

It is important to realize that the stillness needed for knowing God is primarily a stilling of your efforts to know God. Too often you create your own obstacles in prayer by thinking that thoughts are a problem, when really it is your unconscious attitude of achievement that is getting in the way. Thinking about thoughts keeps you on the surface of prayer, especially when thinking is charged with concern and effort. The radical nature of opening stills and quiets your efforts to find God in the unmoving, motionless, unknowing faith that you now recognize awakening within.

The thoughts in your mind do not necessarily go away with this intention to just sit. Wild thoughts may remain. Yet as you just sit still, as you wait in God, a deepening of your consciousness takes place. Thoughts are left on the surface of your mind as you disidentify with them. Just being still over time lets the hidden depths of your being – found in relationship with God's eternal Being – come alive in you. Just sitting still allows all your dualistic efforts at achievement fall away in the grace of God.

This 10 week series is directly 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)