

## Centering Prayer Quick Start Guide

Here are some suggestions for incorporating silence and solitude into your life on a regular basis:

1. **Identify your sacred space and time.** Explore all the possibilities for a time and physical space in which you can be alone on a regular basis. Preferably you can identify a spot in your home, outdoors or in your office that helps you to settle into a quiet and receptive state of being. You may wish to bring a candle, a cross, or some other meaningful symbol into the space to remind you of God's presence with you. Feel free to experiment, noticing what works and what doesn't, until you find the best time and place for you. Once you have identified it, you may want to tell family members or roommates about your new commitment, so they can honor the time by not interrupting you and honor the space by staying out of it during your times alone with God.
1. **Settle into a comfortable yet alert physical position.** One excellent posture for beginning is to sit in a comfortable straight-backed chair with your back and shoulders straight but also relaxed and open, both feet flat on the floor, hands in a comfortable position in your lap. This position is one that can more easily be maintained for long periods without having to shift around, which can be distracting. But getting too comfortable may result in an unintended nap!
2. **Ask God to give you a word or very short phrase that expresses your openness and desire for God.** In the centering prayer tradition, this is known as a **sacred word**. This word, short phrase, or even a simple mental image, is used to refocus your mind when it gets distracted by thoughts, to bring you back to your purpose of yielding yourself to the Holy Spirit, of sitting in the presence of Jesus, soaking in His love for you.
3. **Distracting thoughts are inevitable.** The mind is simply doing what the mind does. Don't try to push these thoughts away or scold yourself about getting off track, but simply let them go by like clouds floating across the sky, or like bubbles rising through water. Help yourself return to your prayerful intent by gently repeating your sacred word in your mind as often as needed.
4. **Resist the urge to judge yourself or your experiences in centering prayer.** The purpose of time spent in silence is just to be with God in whatever state you are in and to let him be in control. Trust that whatever your time in silence was like, it was exactly as it should be. Building a practice of centering prayer is like exercising the body or like growing a garden. You probably won't notice much change after one or even several days, but over time of regular practice, you will find that God is changing you in noticeable ways.

Adapted from *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* by Ruth Haley Barton

and

*Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* by Thomas Keating