

# CENTERING PRAYER

HEARING THE QUIET VOICE OF GOD IN A NOISY WORLD



The great theologian and Christian mystic, Howard Thurman tells the story of a street in Rochester, NY where one night he was able to hear the water of the Erie Canal flowing underneath it. In the noise of daytime, he had never heard it and had no idea it was there. To hear it, he needed silence.

For Thurman, silence was not conjuring a visitation from God, but rather becoming aware of the divine presence that is always there. He says, “The insistence is not so much that something invades the life of man from without, but rather that through quietness and inner solitariness the individual becomes conscious of what it is that he has in him all the time.” Thurman’s theology advocated for stillness and solitude amid an increasingly loud and busy society.

## WHAT IS CENTERING PRAYER?

In Centering Prayer we open our awareness to God’s presence by silently repeating a sacred word or phrase. Unlike Bible reading or spoken prayer, this practice is not about doing or saying, but about simply being with God.

While versions of centering prayer date back to the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the early church, it was reintroduced in the modern era by teachers like Thomas Keating, Basil Pennington, and William Meninger.

## LET’S TRY IT!

Set aside 10–20 minutes in a quiet space. You may want to set a timer so you don’t have to check the clock.

1. **Choose a sacred word.** Select a word or phrase (like “Jesus,” “Abba,” “Speak, for your servant is listening,” or “Be opened!”) to help you stay grounded in God’s presence. This is a gentle anchor when distractions come.
2. **Sit in silence.** Close your eyes. Breathe slowly. When distracting thoughts arise, return to your sacred word and let the distraction drift away.
3. **Rest in God’s presence.** Don’t force thoughts, prayers, or emotions. Simply trust that God is here, whether you feel anything or not.
4. **End with gratitude.** When your timer sounds, take a deep breath. Thank God for this time, and gently return to your day.

Centering prayer can be practiced alone or with others. However you choose to practice, the invitation is the same: slow down, be opened, and listen to God.