

## Practice: Centering Prayer

*The following is adapted from one of Richard Rhor's daily meditations. This one describes the process of beginning centering prayer.*

*Richard Rhor's daily online meditations can be found at [meditations@cac.org](mailto:meditations@cac.org)*

*Here is the simple method for practicing Centering Prayer as taught by Thomas Keating. I hope you'll try it and stay with it for a while!*

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts [including 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 with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

*Sacred word: What this looks like in practice is when (not if) your thoughts wander away from your intention to be present to God's Presence within you, simply say your word silently to yourself. Doing this can be a gentle reminder to come back to the Presence of God. Your word can be any you may choose: Jesus, Spirit, peace, still.... It doesn't matter which word you choose. Rather than repeating the word over and over like a mantra, use it as a gentle hand squeeze to bring you back to Presence.*

**Here is a little more for those wanting to delve a little deeper into understanding centering prayer. Again, this is from Richard Rhor's daily meditations**

*Guest writer Cynthia Bourgeault continues exploring the contemplative practice of Centering Prayer.*

“Centering Prayer is not done with attention but with *intention*,” Thomas Keating repeatedly reminds us. Unlike other methods of meditation, Centering Prayer does not furnish an object for your attention—whether it be repeating a mantra, following your breath, or watching your thoughts as they arise. Rather, you simply withdraw your attention from anything that brings it to a focal point and return again and again to your underlying intention—what *The Cloud of Unknowing* calls your “naked intent direct to God.”

In Centering Prayer, then, everything begins with and keeps returning to intention. What am I really up to in this prayer? What is my aim?

It is difficult, admittedly, to put words around an experience that is deeply personal and intuitive. But in general, you're in the right ballpark if your intention is "to be totally open to God": totally available, all the way down to that innermost point of your being; deeper than your thinking, deeper than your feelings, deeper than your memories and desires, deeper than your usual psychological sense of yourself. Ultimately, what will go on in this prayer is "in secret" (the words that Jesus used in his instructions on prayer in Mathew 6:6): hidden even from yourself, in that inmost sanctuary of your being—where your life is "hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).

The *sacred word* in Centering Prayer serves as a placeholder for your intention. It's the spiritual equivalent of a little piece of red string tied around your finger to remind yourself of your willingness to "do the deal." Unlike a mantra, you don't repeat it constantly; you only use it when you realize you've gotten tangled up in a thought. Then it helps gently and quickly to clear the mental debris and return you to that bare, open awareness.