PRAYER PRACTICES FOR LENT

CENTRING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

Background

Centring Prayer is a way of entering into silent prayer. It moves us from more active and wordy kinds of prayer into a place of resting in God. It is not intended to replace our other ways of praying, but to deepen them and underpin them.
This prayer practice has been part of the Church's tradition since the earliest days, but most recently it has been developed and taught as a method by Thomas Keating – an American Bendictine Abbot who challenged his monks at St. Joseph's Abbey to encapsulate their practice in a method that could be effective beyond the cloister walls for the 20th century.

**Note: 'Centring Prayer' is the UK spelling, though many might be more familiar with the US spelling 'Centering Prayer'.*

Summary of the Practice

Centring Prayer is simply about sitting in silence in the presence of God. We use a single word or short phrase as an anchor to tether our wandering mind. The 'wandering mind' is really part of it all; it is to be expected and we should try not to fight it. Can we instead embrace ourselves with all our distractive thoughts and try to gently bring ourselves back to our sacred word?

Ways to use the Practice

You can do this practice on your own, as well as in a group. The app 'Centering Prayer' gives you some tools to mark the beginning and end of your time.

If children are involved, start off with short moments of silence, like 30 seconds or a minute. They might like to hold something in their hand, like a holding cross, stone or fidget toy, or look at a candle to help them focus.

Time

You might want to start off with short periods of 3-5 minutes. See if you can gradually work your way to 20-25 minutes.

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OUTLINE

1 Set Time

Decide how much time you want to spend praying and set an alarm or use the 'Centering Prayer' app. This will help you to stay focused in your prayer and not have to keep checking your watch.

2 Settle

Begin by taking some time to get comfortable. You might light a candle to be reminded of God's presence, or you might find it helpful to close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Continue breathing slowly, counting to three as you breathe 'in' and three as you breathe 'out'. Imagine breathing out any heavy or difficult feelings you might be carrying. Imagine breathing in God's deep love for you.

3 Sacred Word

As you enter this time of silence, see if a word comes to mind, mull it over and see if it seems good to you. This could be any word that you are drawn to, for instance Presence, Grace, Silence, God, Love, etc. Choose this sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. Having chosen a word, don't change it during this period of prayer.

Children might find it easier to use an object like a holding cross, candle or stone rather than a word.

4 Consent

Sitting comfortably and with your eyes closed, introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.

5 Stay

Thoughts, feelings, outside distractions will emerge. This is normal! Notice them but don't engage them in conversation. Take a few deep breaths and gently return to your sacred word (or object).

6 Emerge

When your alarm or the app rings, remain in silence with your eyes closed for another moment. In your own time, set your sacred word down. Spend a few moments noticing what was going on within.

**Where it says God, you can replace this with Jesus or the Holy Spirit and vice versa.*

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Questions for Reflection

- How did you respond to the practice of Centring Prayer? What was helpful? What was not so helpful?
- How might you use and develop this practice in your everyday life?
- How might this practice be used within your church community?

Note for when reflecting on these questions as a group:

The focus of this exercise is not on the content of people's prayer or what they have spoken about with God. What we are inviting you to do is reflect on the practice itself, how it is or might be useful to you and your church community and how you might practically build it into your life. If someone does share something personal about their experience of the practice, we encourage you to simply say 'thank you' and hold what was shared, possibly with a short moment of silence before moving on.

Resources

Books

- *Centering Prayer: Sitting Quietly in God's Presence Can Change Your Life*, Brian D. Russell (Paraclete Press, 2021)

Online (Apps and Websites)

- *Centering Prayer: the very basics:* www.contemplative.org/contemplative-practice/centering-prayer/
- *Centering Prayer App*, Contemplative Outreach https://contemplativeoutreach.org/centering-prayer-mobile-app/