

The Sacred Art of Prayer



A spiritual journey of the heart

DAY TWO
On Stability: The Rhythm & Balance of Life

DAY TWO: STABILITY
THE RHYTHM AND BALANCE OF LIFE

Objective:

To help participants connect with the rhythm and the balance of their own life, through the attentive attention of their heart and the discovery of how God is speaking to them.

- Prayers & Bible Reading
- Discoveries about your own spiritual practices – how do you pray?
- What is prayer?
- The rhythm of the heart (music, breathing and inner silence)
- Walking the labyrinth
- Sharing – Discoveries
- Pay attention to the rhythm of your life, what centers you and what un-centers you? How do you find stability back again?

OPENING PRAYER

followed by Lectio Divina

SERENITY PRAYER

by *Reinhold Niebuhr*

God, give me grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.
Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the
next.
Amen.

TRADITIONAL SERENITY PRAYER

God, grant me the serenity to accept the
things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.

CLOSING PRAYER

at the end of the session

CELTIC BLESSING

On my heart and on my house

The blessing of God

in my coming and in my going

The peace of God

In my life and in my seeking

The love of God

At my end and new beginning

**The arms of God to welcome me and bring me
home.**

Instructions for Lectio Divina

The passage is read three times by different people.

Before it is read the first time, the leader asks people to notice a word or phrase that grab their attention or shimmer.

- Let them know that there will be a minute of silence following the reading.
- Each participant is invited to share a word or phrase, but nothing more than their word or phrase.
- That person invites another person to share until everyone has had a chance to share.
- This helps to reinforce the container of the circle in that each person is invited through this first round to be there.

The passage is read a second time by another person. People are given 3 to 5 minutes to sit with the passage.

- This is personal reflection time
- Explain that the passage will be read a third time
- During the third reading any participant may say “please stop” where they would like to share any thoughts, questions, image, or way that they connect to the passage.

The passage is read a third time

- Anyone who would like to share a comment, question, image or way that they connect to the passage says “please stop.”
- Discussion is encouraged.
- One person’s sharing may open up an entirely new perspective on the passage for another person.
- This process honors the natural unfolding that happens through this kind of prayerful exploration of Scripture.
- Each participant allows the other participants to “wear” the passage longer or in a new way through the sharing process of this third round.

New International Readers Version	The Message	The New Revised Standard Version
<p>²² Then Jesus spoke to his disciples. He said, "I tell you, do not worry. Don't worry about your life and what you will eat. And don't worry about your body and what you will wear. ²³ There is more to life than eating. There are more important things for the body than clothes.</p> <p>²⁴ "Think about the ravens. They don't plant or gather crops. They don't have any storerooms at all. But God feeds them. You are worth much more than birds!</p> <p>²⁵ "Can you add even one hour to your life by worrying? ²⁶ You can't do that very little thing. So why worry about the rest?</p> <p>²⁷ "Think about how the lilies grow. They don't work or make clothing. But here is what I tell you. Not even Solomon in all of his glory was dressed like one of those flowers. ²⁸ If that is how God dresses the wild grass, how much better will he dress you! After all, the grass is here only today. Tomorrow it is thrown into the fire. Your faith is so small!</p> <p>²⁹ "Don't spend time thinking about what you will eat or drink. Don't worry about it. ³⁰ People who are ungodly run after all of those things. Your Father knows that you need them.</p> <p>³¹ "But put God's kingdom first. Then those other things will also be given to you.</p> <p>³² "Little flock, do not be afraid. Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell what you own. Give to those who are poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out. Put away riches in heaven that will not be used up. There, no thief can come near it. There, no moth can destroy it. ³⁴ Your heart will be where your riches are.</p>	<p>²²⁻²⁴ He continued this subject with his disciples.</p> <p>"Don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or if the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your inner life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the ravens, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, carefree in the care of God. And you count far more.</p> <p>²⁵⁻²⁸ "Has anyone by fussing before the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? If fussing can't even do that, why fuss at all? Walk into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They don't fuss with their appearance—but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the wildflowers, most of them never even seen, don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you?</p> <p>²⁹⁻³² "What I'm trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with <i>getting</i> so you can respond to God's <i>giving</i>. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don't be afraid of missing out. You're my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself.</p> <p>³³⁻³⁴ "Be generous. Give to the poor. Get yourselves a bank that can't go bankrupt, a bank in heaven far from bankrobbers, safe from embezzlers, a bank you can bank on. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.</p>	<p>²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.</p> <p>²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life ^[b]? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?</p> <p>²⁷ "Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.</p> <p>³² "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.</p>

RECOMMENDED SPIRITUAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

SHORT STORIES/DEEP REFLECTIONS:

De Mello, Anthony. *The Song of the Bird*, New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1984.

De Mello, Anthony. *One Minute Wisdom*, New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1988.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES:

De Mello, Anthony. *Sadhana: A Way to God*, New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1984.

PRAYERS & MEDITATIONS:

De Mello, Anthony. *Awareness*, New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1982.

Smith, Martin L. *Compass and Stars*, New York: Seabury Books, 2007.

Newell, J. Philip. *Echo of the Soul*, Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002.

Newell, J. Philip. *The Book of Creation*, New York: Paulist Press, 1999.

Durka, Gloria. *Praying with Hildegard of Bingen*, Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1991.

De Waal, Esther. *A Seven Day Journey with Thomas Merton*, Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1992.

Buechner, Frederick. *Listening to Your Life*, New York: Harpers Collin, 1992.

Wiederkehr, Macrina. *The Song of the Seed*, New York: Harpers Collin, 1995.

Nouwen, Henri J. M. *Bread for the Journey*, New York: Harpers Collin, 1997.

SIRITUAL REFLECTION/DISCIPLINE:

Battle, Michael. *Practicing Reconciliation in a Violent World*: Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2005.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Praying the Psalms*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007.

Dych, William. *Anthony De Mello*, New York: Orbis Books, 2002.

Heshel, Abraham J. *The Sabbath*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.

Guenther, Margaret. *The Practice of Prayer*, Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1998

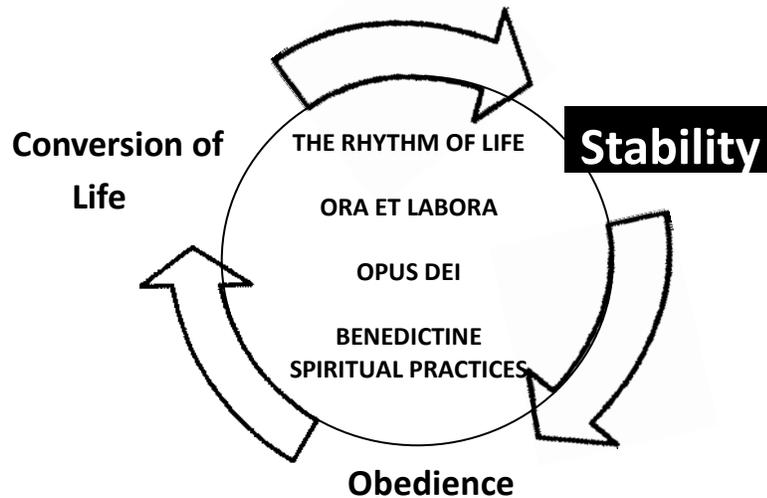
HUMANISM

Fromm, Erich. *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanize Technology*, Harpercollins (September 1981)

ON LINE

Miller, Renee. *Strength for the Journey: A guide to spiritual practice*
<http://episcopalcredo.org/wellness/spiritual-wellness/practice-readings2/>

DAY TWO: STABILITY
THE RHYTHM AND BALANCE OF LIFE



Stability: "accepting this particular community, this place and these people...as the way to God"

Obedience: "a lifelong process of learning...listening to the Word of God, to the Rule, to the brethren and to the Abbot" in order to act.

Conversion of Life: "a commitment to total inner transformation" as we turn to Christ.

THE RHYTHM OF THE HEART

Listen to your heart

What is the heart?

Chinese – the origin of the spirit

Greeks – a place where the spirit lives

Christians – a source of memory and conviction

St Benedict – listening with the ears of the heart (Lectio Divina)

Pilgrimage and the heart

Howard Thurman (Theologian and Civil Right activist) "The longest journey is between the heart and the head"

In our own Anglican Tradition: Reason is one of the pillars that support our Faith.

This attitude created the image that God exists from the neck up.

New theologies and cultural behaviors place the heart in a place of privilege (Spiritual but not religious)

The heart is a place of:

- Receptivity – memories
- Integration – welcoming
- Meanings – inspiration & intuition
- Healing – reconciliation
- Connection – especially with the life beyond us

The inward/outward pilgrimages/journeys

- Inward – connect us with compassion
- Outward – expresses our convictions

Different kinds of hearts

Emotional heart – is the one that allows the expression of feelings – connect us with the action

Mental heart – the one that regulates the emotions and provide us with a good the sense of self-differentiation

Intelligent heart – is the one that synchronizes the brain with the rest of the body – it is the heart that listens to the deep message behind the realities of our daily life and keep us in check so that we do not push issues down

Spiritual heart – is the how we look at things, it is the glass in the window that allows us to see outside.

A Spirituality of the Heart

Physical exercise tunes up the body and promotes good health. Spiritual exercise, he writes, is good for “strengthening and supporting us in the effort to respond ever more faithfully to the love of God.” Ignatius of Loyola.

Note what Ignatius did not say:

He did not say that the Spiritual Exercises are designed primarily to deepen our understanding or to strengthen our will.

He did not promise to explain spiritual mysteries to us or enlighten our minds.

We may emerge from the Exercises with enhanced intellectual understanding, but this is not the goal.

The goal is a response—a certain kind of response. Ignatius is after a response of the heart.

“Heart” does not mean the emotions (though it includes our emotions). It refers to our inner orientation, the core of our being.

This kind of “heart” is what Jesus was referring to when he told us to store up treasures in heaven instead of on earth, “for where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” (Matthew 6:21)

This is the “heart” Jesus was worried about when he said “from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, unchastity, theft, false witness, blasphemy.” (Matthew 15:19)

Jesus observed that our heart can get untethered from our actions: “This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” (Matthew 15:8)

Heart in this sense—the totality of our response—is the concern of the Spiritual Exercises.

This is the ancient meaning of “heart” in biblical usage, but we actually retain traces of this meaning in contemporary English. When we say to someone “my heart goes out to you,” we mean something more than a feeling of concern. If said sincerely, it communicates a sense of solidarity with someone. It means more than “I understand” (our intellect). It means more than “I sympathize” (our feelings). It means something like, “I stand with you in this.” It is an expression of a fundamental choice.

Today we commonly say about someone who shows no enthusiasm for a project that “his heart isn’t in it.” We usually say this when people behave in a way that is at odds with their deepest desires. We say it about ourselves when we hurt people that we love and do things that we know are at odds with who we really are.

This “heart” is what we should be concerned with. We should think of spirituality as a way of getting our hearts in the right place. We are transformed in our heart. Our religious practices and intellectual understandings deepen over time, but it is in our heart that we are transformed.

We can develop many ways to listen to the language of the heart. This is the language that reveals God’s intentions and inspires us to a generous response. What we believe and what we do are important. But the true treasure is in developing the condition of our hearts.

Still, most of us face a persistent temptation to make the Spiritual practice or any kind of spiritual renewal a matter of changing the way we think. Indeed, this danger arises even in a retreat like this, which sets forth ideas and concepts and principles to broaden our understanding of spirituality.

It is vital to realize that understanding is not the goal. We can understand a great number of things, but this may not affect the way we live our lives. The goal is a response of the heart, which truly changes the whole person.

Our spiritual journey is an attempt to answer the question, “What is life all about?”

Conclusion:

Resilience comes from the heart as those who live in the heart are the ones who connect better with a deeper sense of conviction and compassion.

Contemplation is living intentionally—living our life with a sense of compassion and conviction.

Salvation is the process of learning to accept oneself.

We do not earn salvation, it has been already given to us.

Suggestions for Walking a Labyrinth From *Pilgrimage -A Sacred Art*

Sheryl A Kujawa-Holbrook

Walking the labyrinth is a powerful spiritual practice that cultivates personal awareness and contributes to healing and peace. Because it is in many ways a literal journey to the center of the heart, the experience is both deeply spiritual and personally challenging for many people. For the same reason, it is not uncommon for repressed feelings, sometimes buried for years, to come to the surface while walking a labyrinth.

In this way, those who walk the labyrinth as a regular part of their spiritual practice may also benefit from the support of counseling or spiritual direction. Certainly spiritual and psychological breakthroughs are not part of every experience, and the insights gained from contemplative walking will vary from time to time. Those who do not have previous experience in walking a labyrinth may benefit from attending a workshop or retreat before hand, or working with a facilitator.

There is no single way to walk a labyrinth. Adults tend to enter the threshold quite seriously and deliberately; children tend to skip and laugh through the path. Some dance the labyrinth. Your particular spiritual practice may be shaped by your own motivations and visions. Here are a few general guidelines for those interested in walking a labyrinth as spiritual practice:

Prepare for the experience. Learn more about the history and uses of the labyrinth; it is knowledge that will deepen the meaning of the experience. Reflect on your purpose and what you hope to gain from walking the labyrinth. Search out, and if possible visit the labyrinths in your vicinity to see it before you walk, to learn about specific guidelines for their use, and to find out when the path is available. There are both outdoor and indoor labyrinths, and the hours of access are highly variable. In some locations particular times are reserved for groups, so decide in advance if you prefer to walk as an individual at a time when it is quieter or if you would rather be part of a group. Also find out if the labyrinth site accommodates people with disabilities. For those with limited walking ability, there are labyrinths where the path is wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs. There are also hand labyrinths where the path can be "walked" by fingertip or by using a tool. Before entering a labyrinth it is a good idea to reflect on your intentions, feelings, and questions about the walk, either silently or through journal-keeping.

Enter the threshold. Many labyrinth walkers remove their shoes when they enter the labyrinth, a common custom when entering sacred spaces. Some labyrinths, particularly those made of canvas, require that shoes be removed. Remove your watch and turn off your telephone. Many labyrinth walkers acknowledge that they are participating in a spiritual practice by beginning with a nod, bow, the sign of the cross, or some other ritual gesture. You may also say a prayer or recite a mantra or affirmation. Take a few moments as you enter the labyrinth to take a cleansing breath and quiet yourself before the walk begins.

Walk the inward path. On the way towards the center, reflect on those things you want to leave behind and release what is no longer useful in your spiritual journey. Open your heart to

the whole of your experience, the positive as well as the challenging. Walk at a measured pace, conscious of your body and your feelings. If you encounter others on the path, respect the silence and allow them to pass you. Observe your own process and set a pace that is comfortable for you. It is important to maintain your focus throughout the walk. Over time, experienced walkers co-exist with others on the labyrinth seamlessly by cordially sharing the path but also by remaining focused on their own spiritual work. Don't focus on the center as a destination. Instead, strive to be fully conscious of each step on the inward journey.

Step into the center. Labyrinth designs vary in terms of the amount of room at the center. Some centers are roomy enough to accommodate cushions for those who wish to pray or meditate. Sometimes labyrinth walkers choose to sit, kneel, lie down, or prostrate themselves at the center; some centers are standing-room-only. When you reach the center take some time to reflect on the journey. Ask yourself what insights or questions came to you during the journey in? What images came to mind? This part of walking the labyrinth is about being attentive to your sacred center and to the power of the Divine. In many labyrinths you may remain at the center as long as you wish. Some walkers find journal-keeping helpful at that point, hoping to record what developed during the inward journey. Staying still and present in silence is also an appropriate spiritual practice at the center.

Begin the return path. As you leave the center, you will walk the path that brought you there. Reflect on your experience of the center and what you wish to take back to your daily life. This portion is about the integration of wisdom. In the same way you took measured steps inward, take the necessary time to walk intentionally outward, savoring every step along the way. Try to resist the temptation to return at a faster pace. As you leave the labyrinth it is appropriate to once again acknowledge your departure by using a ritual gesture.

Reflect on the experience. Try to plan your time so that you are able to reflect on your experience after you exit the labyrinth. Journal-keeping or another spiritual practice that helps you integrates the experience and return positively to your everyday life is often helpful.

For some pilgrims, walking the labyrinth is an “once-in-a-lifetime” spiritual experience. Others find it helpful to walk the labyrinth as a regular part of spiritual practice, or when confronted with the need for healing or dealing with a particular issue or problem. Most who walk the labyrinth agree that it is a powerful spiritual practice for those who want to forge a deeper connection into the center of the heart of the Divine.



FINGER LABYRINTH

Prayers for the Labyrinth Journey Inward

Before entering the labyrinth:

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of this labyrinth and the opportunity it gives us to walk with you. We ask that you send your Spirit to bless us, this labyrinth and all who follow us on this path.

Come, Holy One...and bless us.

After entering the labyrinth:

The labyrinth is a path of prayer, a spiritual tool to help us become closer to God. We thank our loving God for the many hands and hearts that helped create it. May all who enter this path be guided by your love.

Come, Holy One...and guide us.

At an internal turn in the labyrinth:

The twists and turns of the labyrinth are metaphors for our own individual spiritual journeys. We pray, gentle God, that all who seek your loving kindness will be comforted while walking on this path.

Come, Holy One...and comfort us.

From an outer edge path along the labyrinth:

There are times when we feel far from our center - far from our destination - far from you, God. At times we wonder if we are on the right path. We pray that all those who find themselves at the edges of life's path will find strength and courage to continue the journey.

Come, Holy One...and give us courage.

Just before entering the center:

We pray for all pilgrims on their journeys to become aware of God's presence within all of God's creation. We ask that they feel the presence of God at the center of this labyrinth and find peace in their hearts, minds and souls.

Come, Holy One...and walk with us.

After entering the center:

For medieval pilgrims, the path on the labyrinth symbolically led to their final destination. We pray that all who enter the center of the labyrinth seeking illumination may receive what they need, according to your wisdom, O God.

Come, Holy One...and enlighten us.

Just after leaving the center:

The path leading out from the center of the labyrinth returns us to the daily challenges God created for us. We pray that all who walk this path will be strengthened to serve all creation.

Come, Holy One...and strengthen us.

Half way out of the labyrinth:

Bless this labyrinth and all who walk it, O God. By the power of your Spirit, make this a safe place, a path of discovery, a holy path.

We praise you and bless your Holy Name. Amen.

"PILGRIMAGE" QUOTES...

Pilgrimage is feet-on-the-ground spirituality. Jan Sutch Pickard, Iona Community

A Journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Lao Tzu, The Way of Lao Tzu (ca. 500 BCE)

The Journey is essential to the dream. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)

Thus says the Lord: 'Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. Jeremiah 6:16

All of us are pilgrims on the earth. Maxim Gorky (1868-1936)

That's the power of pilgrimage; you go to a sacred place and release your pain. MC Yogi, Hip Hop Artist

How you get there ...is where you will arrive. Mad Hatter, Alice in Wonderland

We are all longing to go home to some place we have never been -a place half remembered and half envisioned we can only catch glimpses of from time to time. Starhawk (b.1951)

If you fear it, walk towards it. James Baldwin (1924-1987)

To take the first step in faith, you don't need the whole staircase; just take the first step.
Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)

Life is not a particular place or destination. Life is a path. Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926)

QUOTES ON THE "SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART"

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Gospel of Matthew 6:21

Listen with the Ear of the Heart. Benedict of Nursia (480-547)

Only from the heart can you touch the sky. -Rumi (1207-1273)

The search for God

Is a very intimate enterprise

It is at the core

Of every longing in the human heart. --Joan Chittister (b. 1936)

God Wants the Heart – The Talmud

You have made us and directed us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

When we stop to become aware of the heart, we come to the mystery of life. Mary C. Earle

The heart is the place of receptivity, integration, and meaning-making. It is where thinking, feeling, intuition and wisdom come together. In this process we are called to nothing short of transformation. Christine Valters Painter

The longest journey is between the heart and the head. Howard Thurman (1899-1981)

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart. Rainier Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

It is the pure raw heart that has the power to heal the world. Jack Kornfield (b.1945)

The Method of Centering/Contemplative Prayer

Christian Contemplative Prayer is the opening of mind and heart - our whole being - to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words and emotions, whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, thinking, feeling and choosing; even closer than consciousness itself. The root of all prayer is interior silence. Though we think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words, this is only one expression. Contemplative Prayer is a prayer of silence, an experience of God's presence as the ground in which our being is rooted, the Source from whom our life emerges at every moment.

For the Church's first sixteen centuries Contemplative Prayer was the *goal* of Christian spirituality. After the Reformation, this living tradition was virtually lost. Today, with cross-cultural dialogue and historical research, the recovery of the Christian contemplative heritage has begun. The method of Centering Prayer, in the tradition of *Lectio Divina* (praying the scriptures) is contributing to this renewal.

Centering Prayer is a *method* of prayer, which prepares us to receive the gift of God's presence, traditionally called contemplative prayer. It consists of responding to the Spirit of Christ by consenting to God's presence and action within. It furthers the development of contemplative prayer by quieting our faculties to cooperate with the gift of God's presence.

Centering Prayer facilitates the movement from more active modes of prayer — verbal, mental or affective prayer — into a receptive prayer of resting in God. It emphasizes prayer as a personal relationship with God. At the same time, it is a discipline to foster and serve this relationship by a regular, daily practice of prayer. It is Trinitarian in its source, Christ-centered in its focus, and ecclesial in its effects; that is, it builds communities of faith.

Contemplative Prayer

We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. In the Christian tradition Contemplative Prayer is considered to be the pure gift of God. It is the opening of mind and heart - our whole being - to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Through grace we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing - closer than consciousness itself.

Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer is a method designed to facilitate the development of Contemplative Prayer by preparing our faculties to receive this gift. It is an attempt to present the teaching of earlier times in an updated form. Centering Prayer is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer: rather it casts a new light and depth of meaning on them. It is at the same time a relationship with God and a discipline to foster that relationship. This method of prayer is a movement beyond conversation with Christ to communion with Him.

Theological Background

The source of Centering Prayer, as in all methods leading to Contemplative Prayer, is the indwelling Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The focus of Centering Prayer is the deepening of our relationship

with the living Christ. It tends to build communities of faith and bond the members together in mutual friendship and love. "Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10

Listening to the Word of God in Scripture

Listening to the word of God in Scripture (Lectio Divina) is a traditional way of cultivating friendship with Christ. It is a way of listening to the texts of Scripture as if we were in conversation with Christ and He were suggesting the topics of conversation. The daily encounter with Christ and reflection on His word leads beyond mere acquaintanceship to an attitude of friendship, trust, and love. Conversation simplifies and gives way to communing. Gregory the Great (6th century) in summarizing the Christian contemplative tradition expressed it as "resting in God." This was the classical meaning of Contemplative Prayer in the Christian tradition for the first sixteen centuries.

Wisdom Saying of Jesus

Centering Prayer is based on the wisdom saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "...*But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will repay you.*" Matthew 6.6 (New American Bible)

It is also inspired by writings of major contributors to the Christian contemplative heritage including John Cassian, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Francis de Sales, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Thomas Merton.

Centering Prayer Guidelines

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. **(see the Sacred word menu – feel free to add any other meaningful words)**
 - a. The sacred word expresses our intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
 - b. The sacred word is chosen during a brief period of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to inspire us with one that is especially suitable for us.
 - c. Instead of a sacred word a simple inward glance toward the Divine Presence or noticing one's breath may be more suitable for some persons. The same guidelines apply to these symbols as to the sacred word.
 - d. The sacred word is sacred not because of its inherent meaning but because of the meaning we give it as the expression of our intention and consent.
 - e. Having chosen a sacred word, we do not change it during the prayer period because that would be to start thinking again.
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.
 - a. "Sitting comfortably" means relatively comfortably so as not to encourage sleep during the time of prayer.
 - b. Whatever sitting position we choose, we keep the back straight.
 - c. We close our eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around and within us.
 - d. We introduce the sacred word inwardly as gently as laying a feather on a piece of absorbent cotton.
 - e. Should we fall asleep upon awakening we continue the prayer.
3. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

- a. "Thoughts" is an umbrella term for every perception, including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries, and spiritual experiences.
- b. Thoughts are an inevitable, integral and normal part of Centering Prayer.
- c. By "returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word" a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of Centering Prayer.
- d. During the course of Centering Prayer, the sacred word may become vague or disappear.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.
 - a. The additional 2 minutes enables us to bring the atmosphere of silence into everyday life.
 - b. If this prayer is done in a group, the leader may slowly recite a prayer such as the Lord's Prayer while the others listen.

The Guidelines

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 -thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections-, return at any time to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

Some Practical Points

1. The minimum time for this prayer is 20 minutes. Two periods are recommended each day, one first thing in the morning and the other in the afternoon or early evening. With practice the time may be extended to 30 minutes or longer.
2. The end of the prayer period can be indicated by a timer which does not have an audible tick or loud sound when it goes off.
3. Possible physical symptoms during the prayer:
 - a. We may notice slight pains, itches, or twitches in various parts of the body or a generalized sense of restlessness. These are usually due to the untying of emotional knots in the body.
 - b. We may notice heaviness or lightness in our extremities. This is usually due to a deep level of spiritual attentiveness.
 - c. In all cases we pay no attention and ever- so-gently return to the sacred word.
4. The principal fruits of the prayer are experienced in daily life and not during the prayer period.
5. Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence.

Points for Further Development

1. During the prayer period, various kinds of thoughts may arise.
 - a. Ordinary wanderings of the imagination or memory.
 - b. Thoughts and feelings that give rise to attractions or aversions.
 - c. Insights and psychological breakthroughs.
 - d. Self-reflections such as, "How am I doing?" or, "This peace is just great!"
 - e. Thoughts and feelings that arise from the unloading of the unconscious.
 - f. When engaged with any of these thoughts return ever-so-gently to your sacred word.
2. During this prayer we avoid analyzing our experience, harboring expectations, or aiming at some specific goal such as:

- a. Repeating the sacred word continuously.
- b. Having no thoughts.
- c. Making the mind a blank.
- d. Feeling peaceful or consoled.
- e. Achieving a spiritual experience.

Ways to Deepen Our Relationship with God

1. Practice two 20-30 minute periods of Centering Prayer daily.
2. Listen to the Word of God in Scripture.
3. Select one or two of the specific practices for everyday life as suggested in the following web site: <http://episcopalcredo.org/wellness/spiritual-wellness/practice-readings2>.
4. Join a weekly Centering Prayer Group.
 - a. It encourages the members of the group to persevere in their individual practices.
 - b. It provides an opportunity for further input on a regular basis through tapes, readings, and discussion.
 - c. It offers an opportunity to support and share the spiritual journey.

What Centering Prayer Is and Is Not

- It is not a technique but a way of cultivating a relationship with God.
- It is not a relaxation exercise but it may be refreshing.
- It is not a form of self-hypnosis but a way to quiet the mind while maintaining its alertness.
- It is not a charismatic gift but a path of transformation.
- It is not a para-psychological experience but an exercise of faith, hope and selfless love.
- It is not limited to the “felt” presence of God but is rather a deepening of faith in God’s abiding presence.
- It is not reflective or spontaneous prayer, but simply resting in God.

A Guide to Spiritual Practice
A CREDO Resource
M. Renée Miller and Brian Taylor

Art Practice

“Art is not a handicraft; it is the transmission of feeling the artist has experienced.”

—Leo Tolstoy

Bead Practice

“To pray is to listen to the One who calls you ‘my beloved daughter,’ ‘my beloved son,’ ‘my beloved child.’ To pray is to let that voice speak to the center of your being, to your guts, and let that voice resound in your whole being.”

—Henri Nouwen

Body Movement Practice

“The dancer of the future will be one whose body and soul have grown so harmoniously together that the natural language of that soul will have become the movement of the body.”

—Isadora Duncan

Caring Practice

“Caring about others, running the risk of feeling, and leaving an impact on others, brings happiness.”

—Harold Kushner

Centering Prayer Practice

“Contemplative prayer is part of a reality that is bigger than itself.

It is part of the whole process of integration, which requires opening to God at the level of the unconscious.”

—Thomas Keating

Consciousness Practice

“Consciousness succumbs all too easily to unconscious influences, and these are often truer and wiser than our conscious thinking.”

—Carl Gustav Jung

Daily Office Practice

“Seven times a day I praise you.”

—Psalm 119:164a

Discursive Meditation Practice

“We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or short one.

For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a deeper response to our life in God.

*Our only desire and our one choice should be this:
I want and I choose what better
leads to the deepening of God's life in me.*"
—St. Ignatius, from the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises*

Gratitude Practice

"Gratitude is when memory is stored in the heart and not in the mind."
—Lionel Hampton

Handwork Practice

We put great effort into farming which God created and instituted. We all work in common, we (choir monks), our lay-brothers and our hired hands, each according to his own capability, and we all make our living in common by our labour.
—St. Benedict

Hospitality Practice

*"I saw a stranger yestreen: I put food in the eating place
I put drink in the drinking place I put music in the listening place;
and in the blessed name of the Triune he blessed myself and my house;
And the lark said in her song often, often, often
goes the Christ in the stranger's guise."*
—An old Gaelic tune

Money Practice

"Do not value money for any more nor any less than it's worth; it is a good servant, but a bad master."
—Alexander Dumas

Movie Practice

"Even if I set out to make a film about a fillet of sole, it would be about me."
—Federico Fellini

Music Practice

"Music and rhythm find their way into the secret places of the soul."
—Plato

Nature Practice

"All these things remind me that nature is as much a mirror of God's word and wisdom as any words of ours can be."

—Perrin Radley

Reading Practice

"A good book is the precious life-blood of the master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose for a life beyond."

—John Milton

Study Practice

"Study how water flows in a valley stream, smoothly and freely between the rocks. Also learn from holy books and wise people. Everything – even mountains, rivers, plants and trees – should be your teacher."

—Morihei Ueshib

Technology Practice

"Technology is a gift of God.

After the gift of life it is perhaps the greatest of God's gifts. It is the mother of civilization, of arts, and of sciences."

—Freeman Dyson

Walking Practice

"It is not talking but walking that will bring us to heaven."

—Matthew Henry

Writing Practice

"I must write it all out, at any cost. Writing is thinking, it is more than living, for it is being conscious of living."

—Anne Morrow Lindbergh

