

Guided meditation: Centring Prayer

Centring Prayer was developed by the Trappist monk Fr Thomas Keating and others, based on the teachings in the *Cloud of Unknowing* among others. In prayer, we both focus our attention and we let go. We place our attention at the edge of our finiteness and allow ourselves to be drawn beyond into encounter with God. We often find our attention wandering in prayer, and Centring Prayer is one technique that helps us still our bluebottle mind and approach this threshold.

I invite you now to choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you during your time of prayer. Keating suggests your word be simple: just one word, preferably of one syllable, such as God or Love or Light. My sacred word is Grace. In Centring Prayer, you do not meditate on the meaning of the word, or repeat it over and over as a mantra, but use it to bring your attention back when you realise it has wandered.

I will start this time of prayer with a period of focusing on the breath to still ourselves. I will say a short prayer giving consent to God's presence, and then invite you to introduce your sacred word silently in your mind, as though you were laying a feather on cotton wool. Place your attention at the threshold and open yourself to God. We will continue in silent loving attention for about XX minutes. If you find you are distracted by your thoughts, return very gently to the sacred word. I will repeat the verse from Psalm 46 "Be still" to signal the end of the time.

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Take up a posture that is comfortable and close your eyes.

Now become aware of your breathing. Become aware of the air as it enters and leaves your nostrils . . . Not as it enters your lungs, just as it passes through your nostrils . . .

Do not control your breathing. Do not try to deepen it or change its rhythm. Simply observe your breathing, in and out, in and out . . .

Come Holy Spirit, welcome. We consent to your presence and action . . .

Now say the sacred word silently in your mind, laying a feather gently on cotton wool . . .

"Be still and know that I am God." May our hearts remain open to your presence this evening and always.

When you are ready, open your eyes and return to the room.

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Notes

This is the fifth of a series of meditations responding to *Befriending Silence* by Carl McColman, one of the books which the Slow Book Group at Exeter Cathedral has been reading. The book comprises an Introduction, eleven chapters, and a brief Final Word, which we are dividing into six sessions for reflection over the six months April, May, June, July, September and October 2024. In June we covered Chapters 8 and 9 on contemplative prayer and *conversatio morum*.

Thomas Keating's writings on Centring Prayer are contained in his books *Open Mind, Open Heart* and *Intimacy with God*. The breathing exercise is adapted from [*Sadhana: A Way to God, Christian Exercises in Eastern Form*](#) (pdf) by Anthony de Mello.

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