

Practice of Contemplation

Centering Prayer (Breath Prayer)

Contemplation in the Christian tradition is not merely *thinking about* but *being with* God. Centering prayer is a form of contemplation that is intended to open our awareness to the presence of God with(in) us. Through a disciplined silence, this relational form of prayer seeks communion rather than communication. This is not a technique or strategy to “feel” God, nor is it merely an attempt at improving focus or easing anxiety. Those things may be byproducts, but the goal is simply to delight in the presence of God. It is a wordless communion that will in time transform us (2 Cor. 3:18) and compel us to “live in love” (Eph. 5:2) as people abiding in the love of God (John 15:9; 17:22-23). This practice reminds us that the ultimate destination of our spiritual journey is union with God. So, as a way of praying we are not asking for things, but just consenting to be with God in stillness, without the approval of others, the productivity of work, or the stimulation of entertainment. “Be still and know that I am God.” (Ps. 46:10)

Before You Begin

Find a quiet room, seated comfortably with aligned body posture so that your discomfort does not distract you, yet not so comfortable that sleep overtakes you. Set a non-obnoxious timer for at least 5 minutes. Select a word to use as an anchor of your attention, a symbol of your consent to be with God, rather than elsewhere in your mind. Some common words: Amen, Yes, Lord, Abba, Father, Spirit, Yeshua, Shalom, Welcome, Be Still. The word choice is not important, it is only a symbol to recall your attention to God.

Practice

Inhale slowly and deeply. Hold breath for a moment and say softly aloud or internally the sacred word. Exhale slowly and fully. Draw your next breath and repeat. Emerge gradually from the practice by saying the Lord’s prayer very slowly, or repeating Ps. 103, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, all that is within me bless his holy Name.”

Remember

This is truly very simple to practice, yet you may find that to maintain attentiveness and gently release anxieties, desires, fantasies, thoughts, and evaluations is quite difficult. Our attention span is poor, our hearts are restless, and our minds are scattered. Just remember that success is defined by sincere intention, not by mastery of a technique. Don’t expect perfect peace or a sensational awakening to the divine. Just be content to be with God, in all your complicated, wandering mind, and return to Him as often as you can without shame, full of love. The felt experience of union is a gift received, not a goal achieved. As you do this practice more frequently, you may experience it as a respite from a world consumed with pleasure, productivity, and performance; an opportunity to be gathered into God, present to Him, present to ourselves, so we can be a healing presence to the world.