

Centering Prayer

by Matt Slick

(Source: "Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry")

Centering prayer is popping up within the emerging church movement. Centering prayer, also known as contemplative prayer and listening prayer, is the practice of relaxing, emptying the mind, and letting one's self find the presence of God within. It involves silence, stillness, patience, sometimes repeating something, and the practice of "not knowing" as the person seeks God's presence.

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.¹

Centering prayer is "the opening of mind and heart - our whole being - to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions." So, it is a non thinking, emptying of the mind that seeks to find God in a way that is "closer than consciousness itself."² Why? Because, according to the contemplative mystics, absolute truth is unknowable just as God is mystically unknowable. Sure, they know that they can know things in truthful ways, but ultimate truth is not perceivable via the senses and mind. Experiencing God is through silence, emptying of self through contemplation in the quiet of the mind and soul. Some directions for centering prayer are offered at contemplateiveoutreach.org: Here are four guidelines it recommends.

Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.

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.

When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

Sounds pretty mystical doesn't it? Yes, it is and it is based in occult and eastern metaphysical practices, something the Christian church should carefully avoid.
The Occult

Before I became a Christian I was involved in the occult. One of the practices I would undergo when trying to contact the spiritual realm and/or trying to receive some mystical experience would be to empty my mind, remain motionless, and completely open myself up to receive whatever would come. Essentially, I was

seeking an altered state of consciousness and contact with the spiritual world. This is one of the hallmarks of occultic practices and it opens the person to demonic contact.

This centering, this emptying of the mind was a physical and mental process of stillness, waiting, non-thinking, and expecting to have a spiritual experience. It worked. Using these techniques I have seen lights move in darkness, a bright yellow cross materialize out of thin air, and I've heard voices calling me from the darkness. I'm not exaggerating. I was not on drugs, medicated, drinking, or sleep deprived. I definitely contacted something in the spirit realm. But, it wasn't God.

God wants us to contact him through his Son Jesus, in prayer, as we meditate on God's word and truth, not by emptying our mind, being still, not thinking, and "feeling" whatever we can spiritually.

Psalm 46:10

"Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth."

One of the most common biblical verses cited in support of centering prayer is Psalm 46:10, "Cease striving and know that I am God." But, the verse is not about mental emptiness or physical stillness since that would contradict what the Psalms already teach us about prayer and meditation. We are to meditate actively, using our minds, based upon Scripture, not empty nothingness and waiting.

Psalm 63:6, "When I remember Thee on my bed, I meditate on Thee in the night watches."

Psalm 119:15,23,27,48,97, "I will meditate on Thy precepts, and regard Thy ways... 23Thy servant meditates on Thy statutes... 27So I will meditate on Thy wonders. 48And I will meditate on Thy statutes... 97O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day."

We are not supposed to empty our minds and let whatever is out there contact us. Instead, we are to use our minds and meditate upon the word of God. In fact, Rom. 12:2 says, "...be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." If you are doing nothing with your mind but emptying it in an attempt to reach God, you are on dangerous, unbiblical ground.

Conclusion

Centering prayer is an unbiblical and dangerous practice. It can put a person in an altered state of consciousness and open him up to a spiritual connection that is not in harmony with Scripture.

Instead, we are to seek God in prayers that are non-repetitious, with a focus on God's word and truth, with an active mind seeking to find the true and living God through the revelation of the Scripture and communion with his son Jesus.

In short, avoid centering prayer and avoid whatever church promotes it.