

# Rick Warren Makes Bold Move Unveiling Centering Prayer Devotion

(Courtesy of Lighthouse Trails Research)



The image is a screenshot of a Twitter interface. At the top, there is a search bar and a "Have an account" link. Below this is a promotional banner for "RWtoolbox" with a "Sign up" button and a text-to-follow instruction. The main content is a tweet from the account "@RWToolbox" (RWtoolbox). The tweet text reads: "Centering your prayer on Jesus helps keep your day centered on Him and your life. Click now for easy steps how [bit.ly/nDQp1y](http://bit.ly/nDQp1y)". Below the text, it says "11 hours ago via HootSuite".

During the first week of October, Rick Warren made a bold move, revealing his true affinity toward contemplative (centering) prayer. The majority of people who saw this will probably not have recognized the significance of this endorsement, which has led us to put out this communiqué. It was done in a simple Twitter posting on Rick Warren’s Toolbox Twitter account, where a “Tweet” told followers to go to Rick Warren’s Pastors.com website where a step-by-step process in centering prayer (i.e., contemplative prayer) is given. The message told followers to click over to the website for “easy steps” on how to practice “centering prayer.” Once at Warren’s website,

readers saw the following post (click to enlarge):

The screenshot shows the Pastors.com website header with navigation links: HOME, PASTORS TOOLBOX, SHAREABLES, EVENTS, STORE. Below the header is a banner for 'The Sticks Network' with the tagline 'Leading BIG in the small.' and a 'CONFERENCE OCTOBER 17-19 REGISTER TODAY' button. The article title is 'Centering Prayer Trusts Jesus Brings Transformation' by Stacy Smith, dated Sunday October 02 2011 1:51 PM. The article features a quote: 'A healthy spiritual life is an important part of overall wellness. An active and healthy faith life means that we are concerned with something larger than ourselves. It also means, most often, that we are a part of a community of people with similar beliefs and priority to ours. But we sometimes become bored with our normal spiritual routine. One way to add something different to our faith life is to try a practice called "Centering Prayer."' and a list of instructions for practicing centering prayer.

**Centering Prayer Trusts Jesus Brings Transformation**  
Sunday October 02 2011 1:51 PM | Stacy Smith

**prayer**  
the air  
that I breathe

A healthy spiritual life is an important part of overall wellness. An active and healthy faith life means that we are concerned with something larger than ourselves. It also means, most often, that we are a part of a community of people with similar beliefs and priority to ours. But we sometimes become bored with our normal spiritual routine. One way to add something different to our faith life is to try a practice called "Centering Prayer."

Centering prayer is an ancient form of prayer that is a combination of prayer and meditation. The practice was revived in the 1960s and 70s by three Cisterian monks. The practice of centering prayer allows for the recognition of thoughts and gently releases them into the hands of God. This form of prayer relies on the awareness that the Holy Spirit resides in the one who prays, connecting them heart to heart with God.

How do you begin this practice of centering prayer?

- Set aside a minimum of fifteen minutes (increase the time as you can). Set a timer if that helps you to be less concerned about when to stop.
- Settle into a comfortable position.

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Tweet

A few days after this article by Stacy Smith was posted on the Pastors.com website, it was removed. However, no explanation was given as to why it was there in the first place and why it was removed. We believe our article will answer both of these questions.

The Pastors.com article states:

Centering prayer is an ancient form of prayer that is a combination of prayer and meditation. The practice was revived in the 1960s and 70s by three Cistercian monks.

While the article goes on to give some of the steps to centering prayer, one thing the article does not reveal is the spiritual background of these three monks. Because of our work at Lighthouse Trails exposing the dangers of contemplative spirituality, we are well acquainted with the writings of two of these monks: Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington (the 3rd is [William Meninger](#), also a contemplative).

The Pastors.com article states that mystical prayer was “revived” by these three men, who played a primary role in bringing contemplative prayer from the Catholic monasteries to the average layperson. This “revived” spirituality is the very same spirituality that is being heralded in the evangelical/Protestant church known as “spiritual formation.” Rick Warren obviously recognizes this, which is why his Twitter post pointed readers to these men and to their centering prayer. As we examine the spiritual outlook of Keating and Pennington, the logical conclusion will be that Rick Warren has a strong affinity with the same spirituality.

First of all, it is vital to understand that the mysticism practiced by occultists and those in eastern religions is the same mysticism practiced by contemplatives. That can be a hard statement for some to swallow. How can someone like [Brennan Manning](#), who talks about God’s love and His grace, be encouraging people to engage in an occultic practice? Well, obviously, many of Christianity’s major contemplative figures don’t believe they are doing anything wrong. They believe they are teaching a good thing, certainly not something equated to occultism. But even the mystics themselves acknowledge that this is so. Listen to these quotes:

The meditation of advanced occultists is identical with the prayer of advanced mystics. (contemplative mystic Richard Kirby, *The Mission of Mysticism*, p. 7)

This mystical stream [contemplative prayer] is the Western bridge to Far Eastern spirituality. (contemplative teacher Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, p. 18)

Isn’t it interesting that one of evangelicalism’s most popular contemplative teachers, [Ruth Haley Barton](#), was trained at Tilden Edwards’ [Shalem Institute](#). This is another example of how the prayer of “advanced mystics” is indeed the same as that being spread throughout Christianity today through the spiritual formation/contemplative prayer movement.

Now let us examine the significance of [Keating](#) and [Pennington](#), in light of this controversy. Ray Yungen profiles the two men in the third chapter of [A Time of Departing](#). Yungen quotes Basil Pennington:

We should not hesitate to take the fruit of the age-old wisdom of the East and “capture” it for Christ. Indeed, those of us who are in ministry should make the necessary effort to acquaint ourselves with as many of these Eastern techniques as possible.

Many Christians who take their prayer life seriously have been greatly helped by Yoga, Zen, TM and similar practices, especially where they have been initiated by reliable teachers and have a solidly developed Christian faith to find inner form and meaning to the resulting experiences” (from *Finding Grace at the Center*, pp. 5-6).

To also understand the spirituality of Thomas Keating and the significance of what we are trying to convey here, consider the following: Contemplative mystic [Wayne Teasdale](#) was mentored by Thomas Keating in a profound and lasting way. This is backed up in Teasdale’s book, *The Mystic Heart* (foreword by the Dalai Lama) where Teasdale attributes to Keating a prominent role in his spiritual development (the book is filled with Keating references from start to finish). Without any doubt, Teasdale’s spiritual outlook mirrors Keating’s. These following quotes by Teasdale echo Thomas Keating’s spiritual sentiments:

It was during my college years that my first mystical experience occurred. . . . the divine completely took me over. . . . I couldn’t think, analyze, remember, imagine, or speak. . . . For many years I have been intensely aware of the divine as a breathing presence that surrounds me, is within me, and takes me into its self. . . . Whenever I am aware of it, there is no mistaking it for something else. I immediately know who it is. (*The Mystic Heart*, pp. 225-226)

I began to appreciate and value other traditions. I discovered that Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Sufism, the Kabbalah, Hasidism, did not take me away from my faith, but augmented my deep commitment to Christian contemplation. I became impassioned in my interest in these traditions. Interspirituality, and the intermystical life it entails, recognizes the larger community of humankind in the mystical quest. . . . to leave out any spiritual

experience is to impoverish humanity. Everything must be included. (*The Mystic Heart*, p. 236)

These quotes above have briefly laid out the spirituality of Basil Pennington and Thomas Keating, which by Rick Warren's website's own admission are the pioneer's of the contemplative prayer movement ("revived" by the three monks).

Those who have followed Lighthouse Trails and read *A Time of Departing* might remember that Lighthouse Trails sent Rick Warren a copy of the first edition of *A Time of Departing* shortly after it was released in 2002 (ironically, released the same month as *The Purpose Driven Life*). Rick Warren wrote a personal hand-written note to us, after receiving the book, stating:

Just a note to say thanks for the copy of *A Time of Departing* by Ray Yungen. It definitely will be a useful addition to my personal library and resource in my studies. I agree this is a hot topic. Sincerely, Rick Warren

If Rick Warren did actually read *A Time of Departing*, then he knows what the roots of contemplative spirituality are. He knows that Basil Pennington and Thomas Keating advocate eastern style meditation practices. He would also know, if he read the second edition of *A Time of Departing* (of which we also sent him), that his friend Gary Thomas teaches readers to practice mantra-like meditation (repeat a word for 20 minutes – *Sacred Pathways*). He would also know that favorites of his, Richard Foster, Henri Nouwen, Brennan Manning, and Jan Johnson, all advocate the same thing. ([click here](#) to read chapter 8 of *A Time of Departing* – "America's Pastor")

From 1995 to 2010, Rick Warren played a kind of "[catch me if you can with mysticism](#)" game. From his endorsement of the spiritual formation movement in his book *The Purpose Driven Church* (where he called the movement a "valid message for the church" ala Richard Foster and Dallas Willard, p. 127) – to his rallying for emerging church figures like Dan Kimball and Leonard Sweet – to his Saddleback bookstore that carries some blatantly "new" spirituality/mystic promoting authors – to his own book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, which toys with contemplative concepts and names such as Brother Lawrence, breath prayers, monks, god in everything, etc., he has consistently pushed the contemplative underpinnings of the "new" spirituality. And we cannot forget Warren's efforts to bring in New

Age sympathizer Ken Blanchard to help train leaders around the world for his P.E.A.C.E. Plan. Blanchard has consistently for many years advocated for mystical spirituality. With all this in mind (and more), Rick Warren seems to have been one of the most prolific influencers for contemplative spirituality to the evangelical church.

But in 2011, Rick Warren “upped the ante” dramatically. In January, Warren began the Daniel Plan at Saddleback and in his network churches, a diet/health plan in which Warren recruited New Age meditation teachers Dr. Mehmet Oz, Dr. Daniel Amen, and Dr. Mark Hyman. The three doctors openly teach mind-emptying type meditation exercises (e.g. sa-na-ta-ma), and some of this has been carried over already to Rick Warren’s websites. As if such a bold move wasn’t enough to convince the majority of the church that Rick Warren is a contemplative mysticism proponent, his recent Twitter post certainly can leave no more room for speculation.

One thing is for sure, Rick Warren has come full circle when it comes to the contemplative issue. Until 2011, he “beat around the bush” about the issue, even at times saying he isn’t into all that “New Agey” stuff. But today, with his indirect promotion of Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington, Rick Warren has boldly come out of the contemplative closet. One can only wonder now when he will absorb the full disposition of Keating and Pennington. The following statement by Pennington is chilling when you stop to realize this is the direction that millions in the Christian church could be heading thanks to Rick Warren:

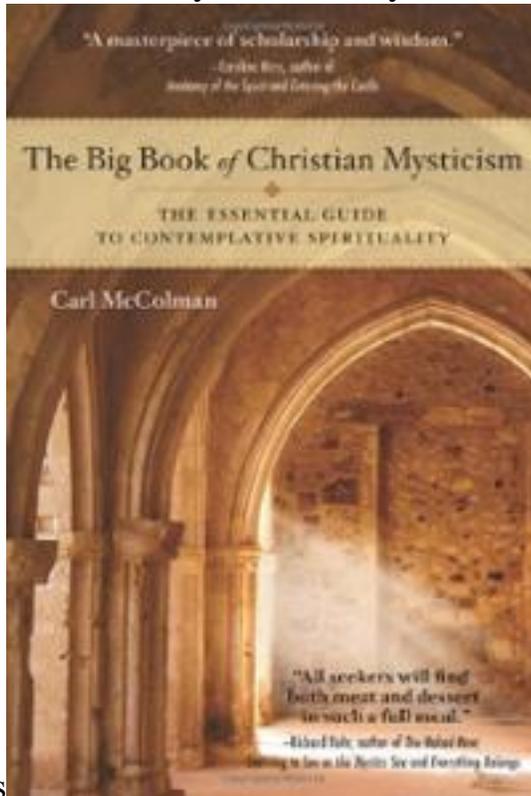
It is my sense, from having meditated with persons from many different [non-Christian] traditions, that in the silence we experience a deep unity. When we go beyond the portals of the rational mind into the experience, there is only one God to be experienced.—Basil Pennington (*Centered Living*, p. 192)

The nature of who this “one God” is can be clearly grasped from this quote by Thomas Keating:

In order to guide persons having this experience [divine oneness], Christian spiritual directors may need to dialogue with Eastern teachers in order to get a fuller understanding. (*Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality*, by Philip St. Romain, foreword)

In other words, the experience that Pennington talks about and that Keating talks about is not an experience that will center you in Jesus, as Rick Warren's "Tweet" account suggests; it will center you in Eastern mysticism, which is why we have no hesitation in labeling this approach as New Age. What one mystical writer saw as a positive thing, those that uphold the Gospel of Christ will clearly see as a slide into apostasy:

Christian mysticism seems, from the beginning, to have had an intuitive recognition of the way in which mysticism is a form of unity that transcends



religious difference. . . . no absolutely clear distinction can be drawn between Christian and non-Christian mysticism. . . . It is precisely in this dimension of mystery that people of different faiths and different wisdom traditions can relate to each other. (Carl McColman, *The Big Book of Mysticism*, pp. 63-64)

Clearly the element that unifies these various traditions is not the person of Jesus Christ. If you were to "dialogue with Eastern teachers" as suggested in the preceding quote, you would learn that what is being experienced is the false "god" that is in each person and in all things. But the Bible makes a clear distinction between God and His creation (Genesis 1:1, John 1:3, Romans 1:25). The God of the Bible will not share His divinity with the phony, impersonal god of pantheism and panentheism:

For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. (Exodus 34:14)

The god of mysticism is discussed in much detail in *A Time of Departing*. It is the same god that the serpent spoke to Eve about when he said, “ye shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5). In fact, centering prayer is actually all about getting to that divine center that mystics believe is in every human being and all of creation.

We stated in this article that centering prayer stands on the same ground as occultism. With that in mind, it is important to discover that both Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington enthusiastically endorsed a book titled *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey in Christian Hermeticism*. It is important to note here that fortune-telling Tarot cards are one of the major tools for divination in occultism. And Hermeticism is a set of ancient esoteric occultic beliefs based on the writings of [Hermes Trismegistus](#), the one who coined the term “as above so below.” [Keating said](#) the book was one of the “great spiritual classics of this century,” and [Pennington said](#), “It is without doubt the most extraordinary work I have ever read.” We’re talking about outright occultism here – there’s no room for doubt.

When you consider that Keating and Pennington’s spirituality is being whole-heartedly embraced by an increasing number of Christians, including many Christian leaders and pastors, the information this article has presented should be sobering and life-changing.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first. 2 Thessalonians 2:3