

It may have been the 12 Step community who came up with the acronym for the word EGO. E-G-O stands for edging God out. I was thinking this week that one of the worst things that we can say or think about another person is “He is just so full of himself” or “She is just so full of herself.” I read a great little explanation of ego by Richard Rohr who is a Franciscan priest and monk. In it, Rohr puts his finger on what it means for our egos to edge God out.

He writes, “We need forms of prayer that free us from fixating on our own egos and from identifying with our own thoughts and feelings. We have to learn to become spiritually empty. If we are filled with ourselves, there is no room for another, and certainly not God. We need contemplative prayer, in which we simply let go of our passing ego needs, which change from moment to moment, so Something Eternal can take over.

This may sound simple but it’s not easy! Because we’ve lost the art of detachment, we’ve become identified with our stream of consciousness and our feelings. Don’t misunderstand me: I’m not saying you should repress or deny your feelings. I’m challenging you to name them and observe them, but don’t directly fight them and don’t identify with them or attach to them (which almost all people do before enlightenment). Unless we learn to let go of our feelings, we don’t have our feelings, our feelings have us. (Is that the deepest meaning of being possessed?)

Now you might ask: ‘What does this have to do with God? I thought prayer was supposed to be talking to God or searching for God. You seem to be saying that prayer is first of all about getting myself out of the way.’

That is exactly what I am saying. God is already present. God's Spirit is dwelling within you. You cannot search for what you already have. You cannot talk God into "coming" into you by longer and more urgent prayers. All you can do is become quieter, smaller, and less filled with your own self and your constant flurry of ideas and feelings. Then God will be obvious in the very now of things, and in the simplicity of things. (Adapted from *Simplicity: The Freedom of Letting Go*, p. 42-43 and *The Art of Letting Go: Living in the Wisdom of St. Francis*, disc 6 (CD)).

Gateway to Silence:

Let go and let God.

"To pray and actually mean 'thy Kingdom come,' we must also be able to say 'my kingdoms go.' St. Francis and St. Clare's first citizenship was always and in every case elsewhere, which ironically allowed them to live in the world with joy, detachment, and freedom." (Richard Rohr)

I wonder, do you, like I do, sometimes feel or think that your mind is continually racing from this thought which causes that feeling to another thought which causes another feeling to yet another thought that elicits yet another feeling, so much so that if someone were to ask you what you were thinking or feeling, that you have so many thoughts and feelings racing around in your mind that it would be hard to answer them, hard to say exactly what you are thinking and feeling at that moment?

Do you sometimes feel sort of like a tennis ball that is being knocked back and forth by this or that thought or feeling? Do you long for a more peaceful mind and heart and wonder what you can do to bring that about?

Going back to Richard Rohr's ideas, the way to achieve this more peaceful, more centered state, to begin to let go of our many conflicting kingdoms and to make room for God's Kingdom to come in our minds and hearts and lives is to somehow make room for God.

Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgeault, Thomas Keating and other contemplatives would say that the way to begin to move toward this more peaceful mind and heart is to enter into the Silence and simply be with God, sit with God in that silence through a daily practice of Centering Prayer.

Our own Becky Hannah has been certified for a while now through Contemplative Outreach to teach centering prayer and in fact she leads our Wednesday afternoon centering prayer group here at Grace. I think it is fair to say that each person who is attending that group is finding centering prayer helpful in his or her relationship with God.

This particular way of practicing centering prayer was developed by Thomas Keating and Basil Penington, both Roman Catholic monks, about 30 years ago in response to so many young people looking to Transcendental Meditation and other Eastern practices of spirituality for a spiritual path. These monks knew that meditation has been a spiritual practice in Christianity for hundreds of years, but primarily practiced in spiritual communities like monasteries and convents.

So, they developed what came to be known as Centering Prayer as a Christian practice which is accessible to anyone who is willing to sit with God in silence each day.

As your priest, I believe this practice of Centering Prayer can be so helpful to us as individuals and as a community that I felt compelled to share it with you this morning.

I was prompted to do so by the opening words of our Epistle reading from Romans where St. Paul writes, “The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the Saints according to the will of God.”

This passage reminds us that God’s Spirit is at work in us both to will and to work God’s good pleasure for us and to conform us into the image of Jesus.

The following verses of Scripture speak to our need to meet God in the silence:

From Psalm 62

For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.

For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.

Psalm 37.7:

Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him;
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,
over those who carry out evil devices.

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Psalm 46.10:

‘Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.’

Habakkuk 2.20:

The LORD is in his holy temple;
let all the earth keep **silence** before him!

Spending time in silence with God is a total dependence on the Spirit to do the work of God in us. Our part is to let go and allow the Holy Spirit to intercede for us, as we sit quietly in God's presence. You've heard me say before that advancing in the spiritual life is not about trying harder, but rather surrendering to God and giving our consent to God's presence and God's action within us.

If the idea of practicing Centering Prayer is new to you, I want to give you a taste of what it is like by spending five minutes in silence together this morning.

So, let's think about the logistics of the practice for a moment. The way we practice centering prayer is to sit with our feet flat on floor, with our hands lying gently in our laps. We balance our heads on our shoulders as if we were looking straight ahead and then close our eyes.

You will need a prayer word or phrase to use this morning during our time of centering prayer. Normally, you would select your own word of one or two syllables, or a phrase of two words, but in the interest of time, let's use the phrase "Let go" as our prayer "word".

The prayer word or phrase is used in centering prayer to displace a thought that has come into our minds. When, in the silence, a thought intrudes, we simply very gently think our prayer phrase which acts to gently push the intruding thought from our minds and help us return to the silence. Keating says that we introduce our prayer word as gently as if we were placing a feather on a piece of cotton.

The use of the prayer word renews our intention to be receptive to God's presence and action within us. It is a way to say yes to God.

So, in just a few minutes, as we are sitting in the silence together and you find yourself having a thought like what you might like to have for lunch today, you gently think, "Let go" and thereby renew your intention to be receptive to God's presence and action within you, and thereby return to the silence.

Now, I remember Becky Hannah saying, "Remember, the thoughts that you keep having during the silence are normal and even necessary because every thought gives you an opportunity to introduce the prayer word which renews your intention to be open to God's presence and action within you.

I wanted us to do this together this morning to provide each of us with another tool for our prayer tool box, and to experience a way that helps us make room for God amid the many thoughts and feelings which we experience every day. You might choose to begin at home with five minute sessions and work your way up to two twenty minute sessions each day, one session in the morning and one in the early evening, which is what is recommended by Keating and others.

If you want to learn more about the practice of Centering Prayer, I can recommend a book and/or you can come on Wednesdays at 5:30 p.m. to the Centering Prayer Group which meets every Wednesday in my office at 5:30pm. Each week we spend the first 20 minutes in silence together. We spend the next 40 minutes or so watching a video or listening to a tape on the practice of Centering Prayer and are on our way by 6:30 pm.

So, let's prepare for our five minutes of centering prayer together. Don't worry about any noise from children or noise from traffic outside. It is just ambient noise that we overlook. One could practice centering prayer on a bench at the corner of a busy street. There is almost always some kind of ambient noise. Please sit with your feet flat on the floor and your hands laid gently in your lap and your eyes closed. Balance your head on your shoulders as if you were looking straight ahead. Remember when you find yourself having a thought, simply displace that thought by thinking those two words, "Let go."

We will begin when we hear the timer chime 3 times and end in 5 minutes when the timer chimes 3 more times. Let's begin.

(After the five minutes)

Thank you for your attention and for your intention to enter the silence of God's presence together.