



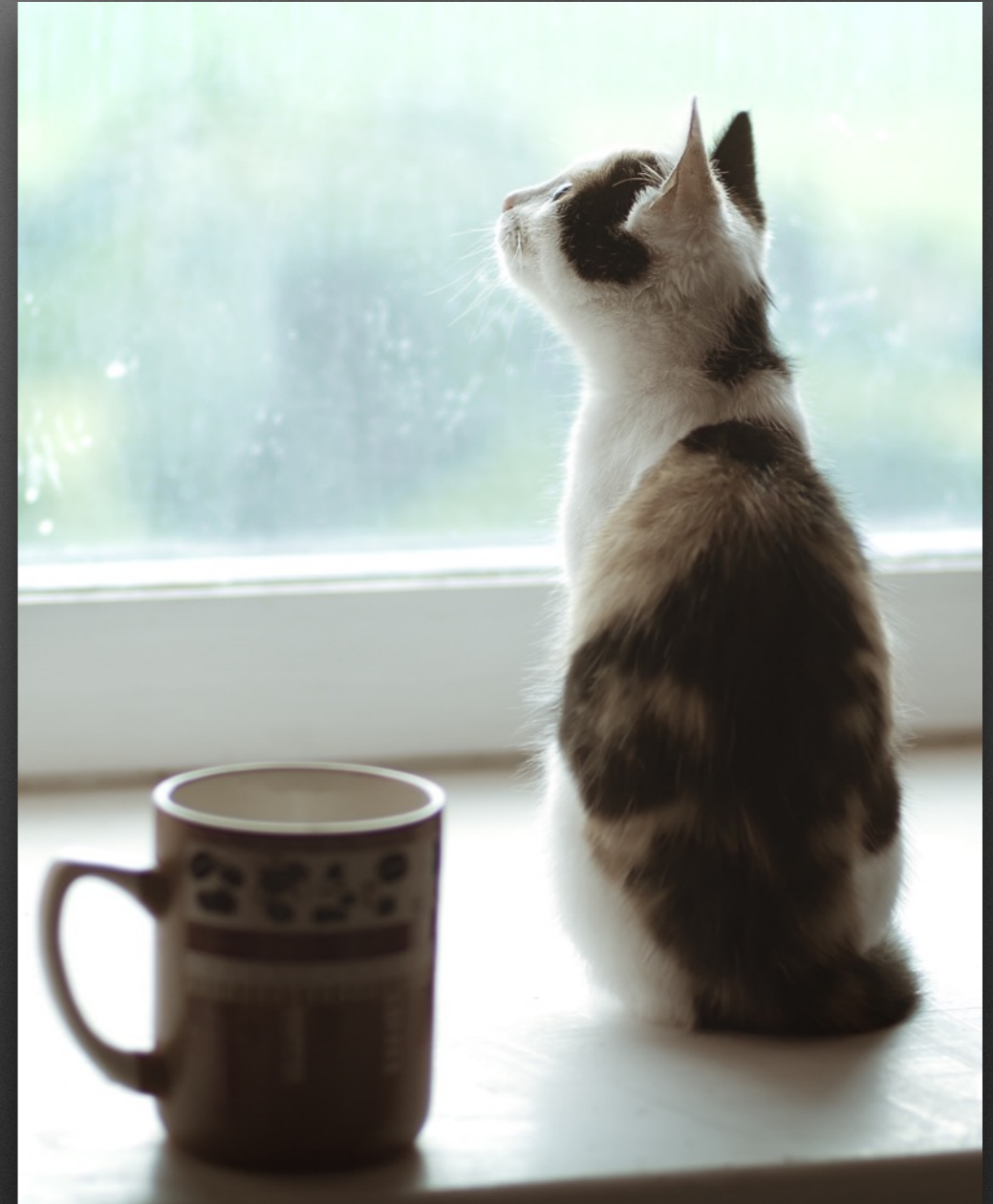
SILENT PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT MATTERS

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Introduction

- Hi! I am Carl McColman, and I love to share the blessings of contemplation and silent prayer with others.
- This presentation is geared toward Catholics and other Christians, but I hope it can be a blessing to everyone.
- Silence is good for you. Alas, we live in a culture which tends to be very noisy. Whatever your faith identity, I hope you will make time for silence in your life.



CONTEMPLATION

- “Contemplative Prayer” and “Contemplation” can seem intimidating — the kind of prayer only a saint would do.
- In reality, this kind of prayer is available to everyone.
- Traditionally Christianity has seen contemplation as a gift from God. It’s not something we achieve, but something that, by grace, we receive.



“Contemplation: A form of wordless prayer in which mind and heart focus on God's greatness and goodness in affective, loving adoration; to look on Jesus and the mysteries of his life with faith and love.”

—Glossary of the Catholic Catechism

Elements of Contemplation

- A form of wordless prayer;
- Focus on God's greatness and goodness;
- Affective, loving adoration;
- Looking at Jesus with faith and love.
- The three key elements:
GOD ~ silence ~ love.



God is always present

“Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee
from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol,
you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning and
settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand
shall hold me fast.”

— Psalm 139:7-10



“Silence is God’s first language; everything else is a poor translation. In order to hear that language, we must learn to be still and rest in God.”

– Father Thomas Keating, O.C.S.O.

God calls us to be silent

- “Be still, and know that I am God!” — Psalm 46:10
- “For God alone my soul waits in silence.” — Psalm 62:1
- “Wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”
— Lamentations 3:26
- “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!”
— Habakkuk 2:20



“God is love.”

– First Letter of Saint John

“We love because God first loved us.” — 1 John 4:19

- Praying in silence is a way of giving attention to God;
- Such attentiveness, when freely and joyfully given, is an expression of love;
- Prayer that is silent, and loving, in the presence of God (who first loved us), is prayer that makes us available for the gift of contemplation.



“The important thing is not to think much but to love much, and so to do whatever best awakens you to love.”

– Saint Teresa of Ávila

Why do we need silence?

- Silent prayer is a way to take our focus off of *our* needs and learn to rest in God's quiet presence.
- It is very humbling, because we discover our minds are not very good at being quiet.
- Silence teaches us that we are not the same thing as our thoughts and feelings.
- In silence we "let go and let God."



Is it dangerous to empty your mind?

- Silent prayer does *not* “empty” the mind. You remain conscious and in control of your thoughts and feelings.
- Many people who engage in silent prayer find it frustrating how noisy their minds often remain.
- Silence is a gift from God. It is always within us, but we usually cover it up with our mental chatter. In silent prayer we take our attention off of our busy thoughts and gently rest it in the already-present silence.

Who should do it?

- Silent prayer is for everyone.
- Church leaders (ordained or lay) find this kind of prayer to be particularly nurturing, especially given their duties.
- Elderly and disabled folks often find this kind of prayer is a gentle way to remain spiritually connected to others.
- *The busier your life is, the more you need silent time.*



How do you do it?

- While some *methods* of silent prayer are popular (centering prayer, the Jesus prayer, etc.), such formal approaches are optional.
- Silent prayer can be as simple as finding a quiet place and resting in the silence, praying a simple word or a scripture verse to keep your attention focused.
- Do it every day. Make resting in silence part of your life.



A Few Helpful Hints

- Your body is part of your prayer. So find a relaxed but alert and dignified posture for your prayer.
- How long? There's no hard and fast rule. Ten minutes every day is better than an hour once a week. Many people who pray daily find it nourishing to embrace silence for twenty to thirty minutes, once or twice a day.
- This is not meant to replace other forms of prayer you love and enjoy, such as sacred Bible reading, intercessory or petitionary prayer, or the Daily Office. Silence supports all forms of prayer.
- Allow your prayer to be "imperfect." Fidgetiness or distracting thoughts and feelings are very common during silent prayer.

Breathe on me, breath of God

- The Hebrew and Greek words for “Spirit” are related to words for “breath.” We see this in English, too: respiration and inspiration.
- Some people find a helpful way to pray in silence is to gently pay attention to their breathing, in a relaxed way.
- This kind of prayer can lead to a profound sense of peace and well-being.

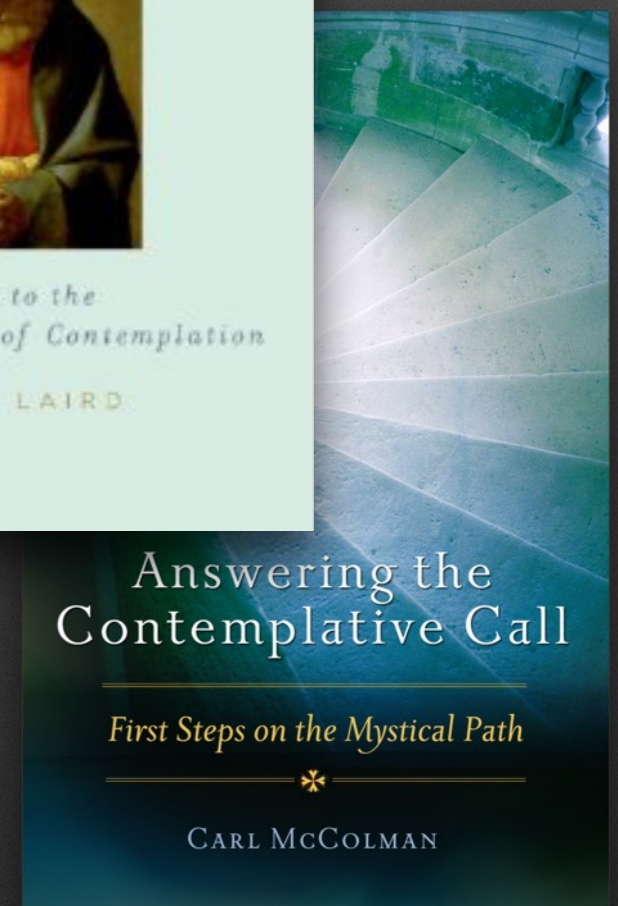
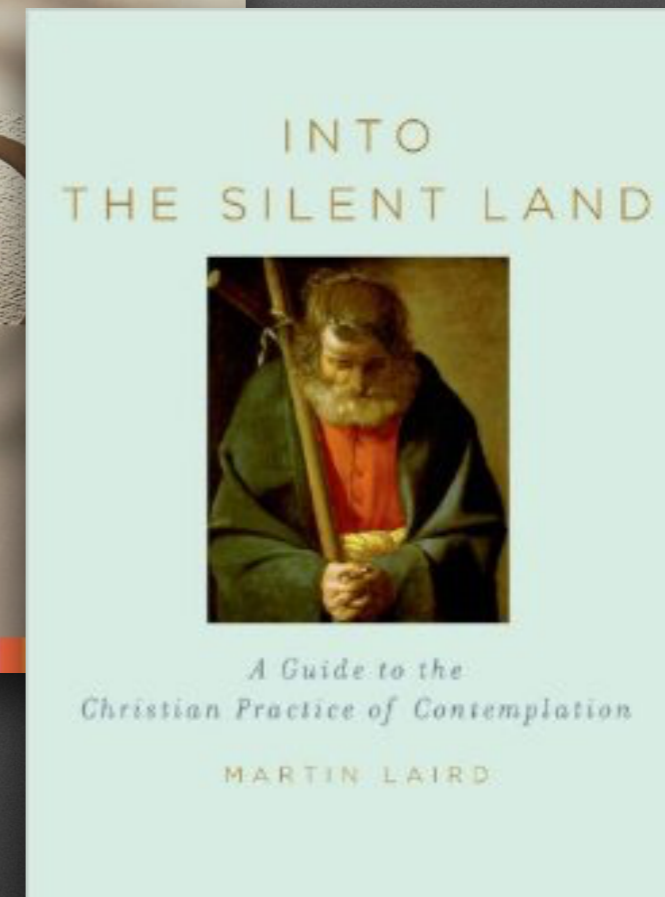
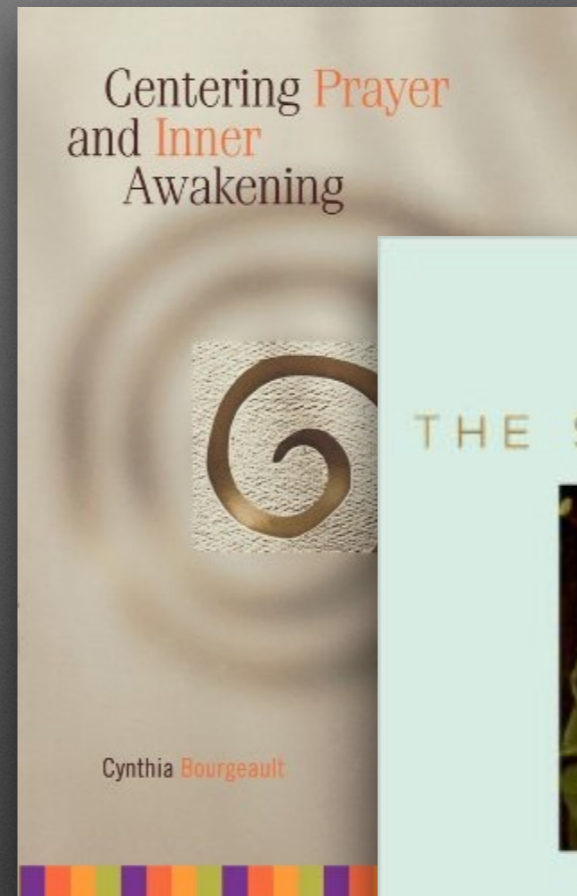


“Where two or three are gathered...”

- While silent prayer can be an enriching part of a personal prayer discipline, it is important to remember that Christianity, as a faith, is social in its nature.
- Therefore, it's helpful to connect with other people who share your interest in contemplative spirituality.
- One on one spiritual relationships — spiritual direction or spiritual companionship — can be an important part of your ongoing spiritual life. *I recommend anyone engaging in daily silent prayer to meet with a spiritual companion regularly.*
- If your church or faith community does not have a prayer group that practices silence, consider starting one.

For further reading...

- Fortunately, many good books exist to support the pursuit of silent prayer.
- Here are a few suggestions:
 - *Into the Silent Land* by Martin Laird;
 - *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* by Cynthia Bourgeault
 - *Answering the Contemplative Call* by Carl McColman (that's me).



Resources for Silent Prayer

- Spiritual Directors International (to learn about, and find, a spiritual companion): www.sdiworld.org
- Shalem Institute (ecumenical ministry fostering spiritual growth and contemplative living): www.shalem.org
- Contemplative Journal (interfaith resources for the practice of silence): www.contemplativejournal.org
- Contemplative Outreach (support for practitioners of centering prayer): www.contemplativeoutreach.org
- Carl McColman's website: www.carlmccolman.com

About Carl McColman

- I'm the author of books like *The Big Book of Christian Mysticism* and *Befriending Silence*;
- I blog at my own website and regularly contribute to the Huffington Post and Patheos;
- I regularly speak at churches, seminaries, monasteries and other venues about Christian spirituality and contemplative prayer.

