

What is Silent Prayer?

Understanding the practice and purpose of wordless prayer

Romans 8:26



Silent prayer is a receptive posture of openness toward God. It is a way of waiting with a heart awake to God's presence and Word. This kind of prayer intentionally trusts and rests in the presence of the Holy Spirit deep in our own spirit. So, the purpose of practicing silent prayer is to develop an open, restful receptivity to the Trinity that enables me to always be with God just as I am.

Go beyond your words.

We often associate prayer with the words we say. But silent prayer is a way of being with God that does not depend on giving the Holy One information about what we would like done in the world at large. Just as friends can enjoy one another without conversing, silent prayer is a way of being with God without wordiness.

Transform your prayer experience into rest.

In silent prayer, we rest and wait. Keeping our hearts alert and awake to the presence of God and his Word, we listen. Psalm 131 contains a wonderful image of a weaned child stilled and quieted in a mother's arms. A weaned child isn't looking to nurse. A weaned child comes to the mother for love and communion. The Psalmist writes: "I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me."

In silent prayer, we rest in God, depending on him to initiate communion and communication. We don't ask for things, we simply open ourselves to the Trinity, trusting we will be received into restful arms. It can be helpful to use the imagination to put you in a receptive frame of mind. For example, use a Scriptural image like the one mentioned above.

Silent prayer requires patience, but it is not the heavy work that intercession can sometimes be. It can even be light, playful, tender, and joyful. In a world given to activity and overwork, silent prayer is a way we join God in a place of divine rest and love.

Find deeper connection with God.

Silent prayer is a response to God's initiative to "abide in Christ." In Colossians 1:26–27, Paul writes of 1) the saving gospel to those without Christ, and 2) the "mystery of the gospel" to the saints, which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Silent prayer puts us in a place to become more receptive to the mystery of the gospel, "Christ in you." Silent prayer need not be a mystical experience; it is far more likely to be a restful experience of Christ-in-me.

Life makes it evident that what we contemplate shapes us. Saints down through the ages have trusted that silent prayer focusing on the truth, beauty, and goodness of the Trinity could ultimately shape and change their souls. The interior transformation which the saints call "divine union" is a fruit of this prayer.

—ADELE CALHOUN, from the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Intervarsity Press, 2005). Used by permission.

Discuss

1. Does the phrase "giving the Holy One information about what we would like done in the world at large" describe your prayer life?
2. In general, are you comfortable or uncomfortable with silence? Why?
3. How could you incorporate silent prayer into your current prayer life?