

Week One

Hope is born in silence.

**I pray for the grace to experience hope
as I meet with You in silence.**

Notes for Contemplative Reading and Prayer

- Read slowly, perhaps out loud. Pause often. Let words and images breathe. Notice what grabs your attention.
- Don't worry about completing every day. This practice is about connection, not completion. God is with you, no matter what.
- This isn't a test. There is no pressure to perform. The Spirit will be your guide. You may simply follow.
- Take stock of yourself as you read and pray. How is your heart responding? Your mind? Your body? Notice what you notice.

Use the prayer template on page 3 for each day:

Day 1: Read the passage below from Luke 1. Imagine the scene, focusing on your senses. Place yourself in the story.

Day 2: Read the passage again. Consider the role of silence in the story. How was it a punishment? How was it a gift?

Day 3: Centering Prayer. Practice silence with God.

Day 4: Cultivate silence. Use a tool (art, sound, image, journaling questions, movement) to explore silence.

Day 5: Repeat one of the days above.

Centering Prayer

"In quietness and trust is your strength."

Isaiah 30:15

Centering prayer was developed by Thomas Keating in the 1970s, but its roots trace back to the early Christian Church. Since the days of the Desert Mothers and Fathers (in the 4th and 5th centuries), believers have cultivated interior silence as a way of "being still and knowing God" (Psalm 46).

In centering prayer, we release "more" and embrace "less." We trust that as we quiet our hearts and minds, we find Jesus in the silence. He meets us there and receives our stillness as worship.

To begin, set a timer (I recommend 5 minutes), and move through the following steps:

1. **Choose** a word for your prayer time: a name for God, a word from the Gospel story above, or a short prayer (3-4 words, max).
2. **Sink** into prayer. Take a deep breath. Let your mind grow still. Imagine you are a scuba diver, sinking deeper and deeper into God's love.
3. **Return** to your word when thoughts pop up (which they will). When you notice your mind has drifted, simply let the thoughts float away like bubbles. Repeat your phrase and let it serve as the anchor, pulling you deeper into God.
4. **Rise** back. When your timer chimes or you are satisfied, let your attention float back to the world. Slowly open your eyes. Take a deep breath and notice God's love all around you.

Hope Week

Zachariah & the Angel

It so happened that as Zachariah was carrying out his priestly duties before God, working the shift assigned to his regiment, it came his one turn in life to enter the sanctuary of God and burn incense. The congregation was gathered and praying outside the Temple at the hour of the incense offering.

Unannounced, an angel of God appeared just to the right of the altar of incense. Zachariah was paralyzed in fear.

But the angel reassured him, “Don’t fear, Zachariah. Your prayer has been heard. Elizabeth, your wife, will bear a son by you. You are to name him John. You’re going to leap like a gazelle for joy, and not only you—many will delight in his birth. He’ll achieve great stature with God.

“He’ll drink neither wine nor beer. He’ll be filled with the Holy Spirit from the moment he leaves his mother’s womb. He will turn many sons and daughters of Israel back to their God. He will herald God’s arrival in the style and strength of Elijah, soften the hearts of parents to children, and kindle devout understanding among hardened skeptics—he’ll get the people ready for God.”

Zachariah said to the angel, “Do you expect me to believe this? I’m an old man and my wife is an old woman.”

But the angel said, “I am Gabriel, the sentinel of God, sent especially to bring you this glad news.

But because you won’t believe me, you’ll be unable to say a word until the day of your son’s birth.

Every word I’ve spoken to you will come true on time—*God’s* time.”

Meanwhile, the congregation waiting for Zachariah was getting restless, wondering what was keeping him so long in the sanctuary. When he came out and couldn’t speak, they knew he had seen a vision. He continued speechless and had to use sign language with the people.

When the course of his priestly assignment was completed, he went back home. It wasn’t long before his wife, Elizabeth, conceived. She went off by herself for five months, relishing her pregnancy.

“So, this is how God acts to remedy my unfortunate condition!” she said.

Luke 1: 8-25 (MSG)

Hope is born in silence.

