

# Therapist Self-Care and Christian Spirituality



**CONNECTING SELF-CARE, SPIRITUALITY  
AND ETHICAL MFT PRACTICE**

**MARK REYNAUD, MA, LPC-S, LMFT-S  
AND**

**KATHERINE ARNOLD, MAMFC, LPC-S, LMFT-SC**

# AAMFT Code of Ethics



- Standard 3: Professional Competency and Integrity
  - MFTs maintain high standards of professional competency and integrity.
  - Integrity – the state of being whole and undivided; the condition of being unified, unimpaired, or sound in construction
- 3.3: MFTs seek appropriate assistance for issues that may impair work performance or clinical judgement.

Question: to what degree does burn-out affect your work performance and/or clinical judgement?

# ACA Code of Ethics



- Section A: The Counseling Relationship
  - A.4.a: Counselors act to avoid harming their clients, trainees, and research participants and to minimize or to remedy unavoidable or unanticipated harm.
- Section C: Professional Responsibility
  - Intro: ...Counselors engage in self care activities to maintain and promote their own emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities.

# ACA Code of Ethics (continued)



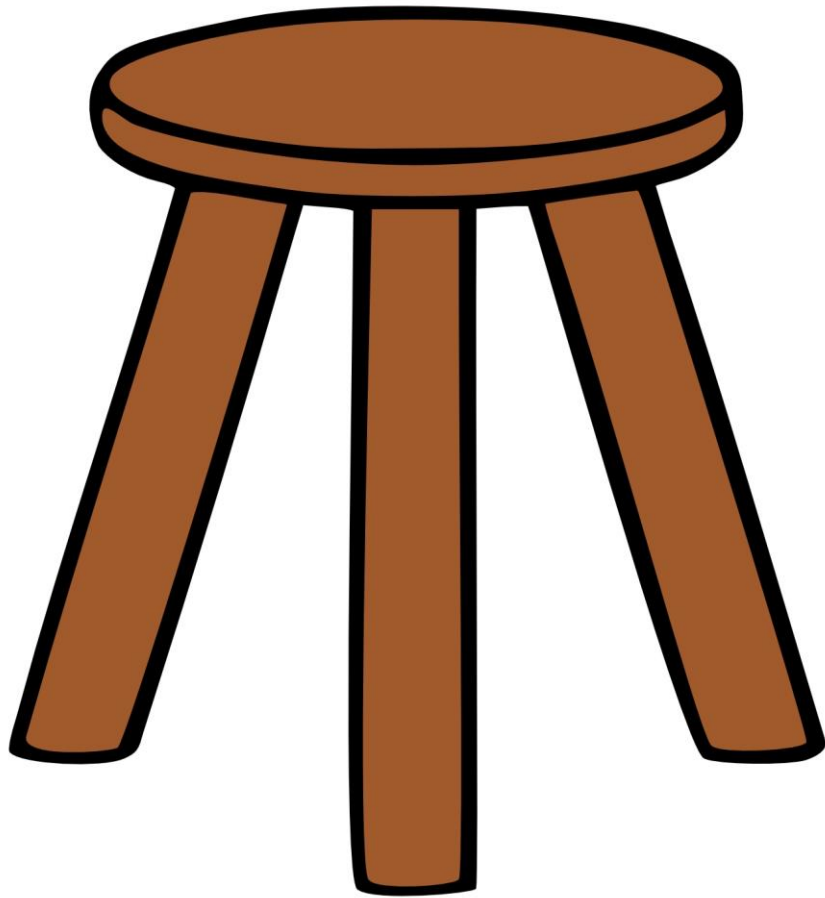
- C.2.d: Counselors continually monitor their effectiveness as professionals and take steps to improve when necessary. Counselors take reasonable steps to seek peer supervision to evaluate their efficacy as counselors.
- C.2.g: Counselors monitor themselves for signs of impairment from their own physical, mental, or emotional problems and refrain from offering or providing professional services when impaired. They seek assistance for problems that reach the level of professional impairment, and, if necessary, they limit, suspend, or terminate their professional responsibilities until it is determined that they may safely resume their work. Counselors assist colleagues or supervisors in recognizing their own professional impairment and provide consultation and assistance when warranted with colleagues or supervisors showing signs of impairment and intervene as appropriate to prevent imminent harm to clients.

# LPC Board Professional Assistance Program



- The goal of the professional assistance program is to provide for public protection through monitoring and a remedial course of action applicable to licensed and provisional licensed professional counselors and to licensed and provisional licensed marriage and family therapists who are functionally impaired in their ability to safely practice. Impairments include, but are not limited to mental, physical, and addictive disorders or other conditions. The program also supports recovery through preventative measures and allows entrance into the program before harm occurs.

# Three Legs of the Spiritual Life



- Fasting – emptying the self
- Prayer – Replenishing the self
- Almsgiving – Giving to others



# St Gregory the Great

## 540-604 AD

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Translation and Introduction by George Democopoulos

St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY  
2007



# Quotes from St Gregory (1)



- No one presumes to teach an art that he has not first mastered through study. How foolish is it therefore for the for the inexperienced to assume pastoral authority when the care of souls is the art of arts.
- Thus the spiritual life of the laity flounders because even though these people have an innate desire to grow spiritually, they encounter a stumbling block, so to speak, in the example set by the person who is supposed to lead them.



## Quotes from St. Gregory (2)



- The spiritual director should not reduce his attention to the internal life because of external occupations, nor should he relinquish his care for external matters because of his anxiety for the internal life...
- Otherwise, he will either ruin his meditation because he is occupied by external concerns or else he will not give to his neighbors what he owes to them because he has devoted himself to the inner life only

## Quotes from St Gregory (3)



- But how can a leader of souls employ his pastoral dignity among the laity if he himself is engaged in the very worldly affairs that he is supposed to correct in them?
- But all of this will be done solemnly by the spiritual director if, inspired by the Spirit of heavenly fear and love, he meditates daily on the precepts of the sacred word.

# Scriptural Foundations



- The Golden Rule
  - Mt 7:12
  - Lk 6:31
- Jesus washes the feet of the apostles
  - Jn 13: 1-20

# Is Selfcare Selfish?



**CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:**

**SELFISH**

**SELFLESS**

**SELFNESS**

# Selfcare is Selfness



## Selfness

- Recognizes needs of self and others
- Values self and others, equally
- Makes time for self and others

## Selfish

- Focuses only on needs for self
- Values self before others
- Priorities time for self before others

# Jesus Models Selfness



- “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where **he prayed.**” Mark 1:35-37
- “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get **some rest.** So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.” Mark 6:31-32
- “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places **and prayed.**” Luke 5:16
- “Jesus was in the stern, **sleeping** on a cushion.” Mark 4:38
- “They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began **to teach.**” Mark 1:21
- “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “**Stay here** and keep watch.” Mark 14:34

# Scripture Supports Selfness



- **Accepting Comfort:**
  - “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4
- **Physical Rest and Physical Body:**
  - “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.” Exodus 20:8
  - “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Mark 2:27
  - “Do you not know that your bodies are **temples** of **the** Holy Spirit, who **is** in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;” 1 Cor. 6:19
  - “In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for **special purposes** and some for common use.” 2 Tim. 2:20
- **Meditation and Prayer:**
  - “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night...” Joshua 1:8
  - “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” Ephesians 6:18
- **Learning**
  - “...let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—” Proverbs 1:5

# What do we Know?



## Actions

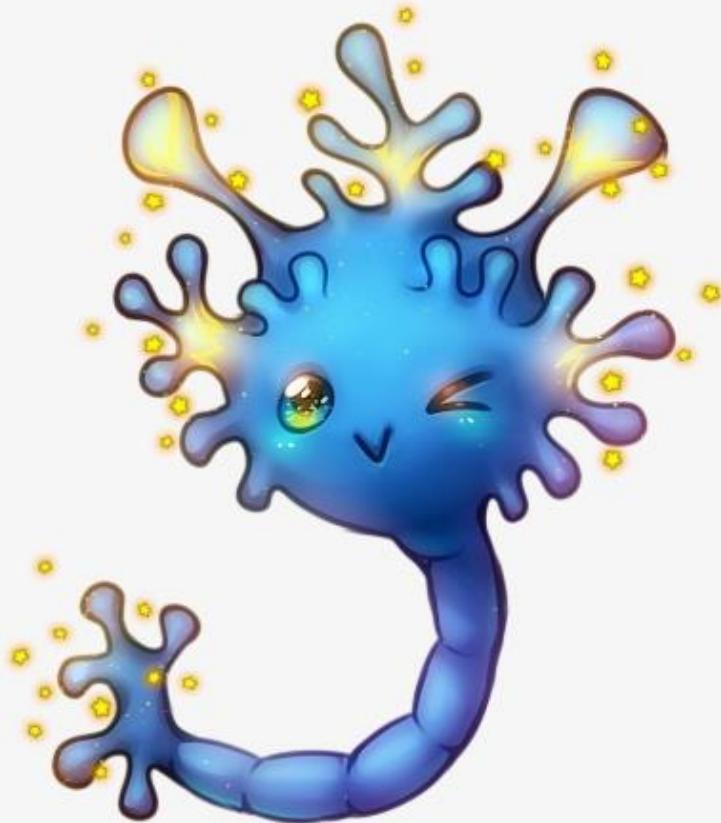
- Sleep & Rest
- Learning
- Meditation
- Prayer

## Results

- Improves physical health
- Changes our brain
- Increases our Attachment
- Engages our PSNS



# Consider: Scripture reading and memorization



- How can scripture reading and memorization be part of selfcare?
- How is it supported by Cognitive Behavior Therapy?
- How is it supported by other theoretical frameworks?

# Cognitive Behavior Therapy



- Cognitions  $\leftrightarrow$  (emotions)  $\leftrightarrow$  Behaviors
  - Neurons that “Fire together Wire together” – neurocircuitry is created and strengthened by neuropathways and myelination
  - Mental practice or mental force changes the brain – practicing and rehearsing yields increased effectiveness in application

“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.” Proverbs 23:7

# Renewing Your Mind Neuroscience



**DO NOT CONFORM TO THE PATTERN OF THIS  
WORLD, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE  
RENEWING OF YOUR MIND.**

**ROMANS 12:2**

# Brain Anatomy and Functions

(How we relate to God)



- **Fontal lobe**

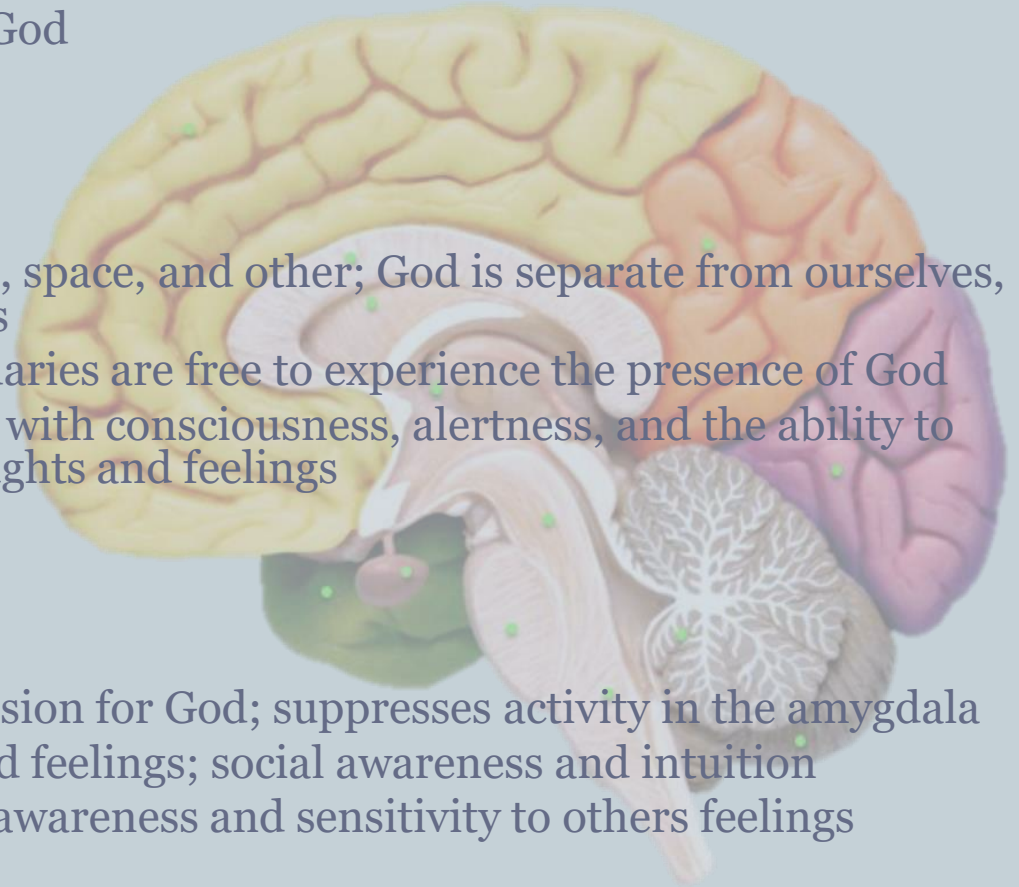
- Logic, rationale constructs of God
- Ability to focus

- **Parietal lobe**

- Sense of self in relation to time, space, and other; God is separate from ourselves, existing beyond the boundaries
- Decreased activity – the boundaries are free to experience the presence of God
- Increased activity – associated with consciousness, alertness, and the ability to resonate to other people's thoughts and feelings

- **Anterior Cingulate**

- Experience of love and compassion for God; suppresses activity in the amygdala
- Mediator between thoughts and feelings; social awareness and intuition
- Increased activity – increased awareness and sensitivity to others feelings

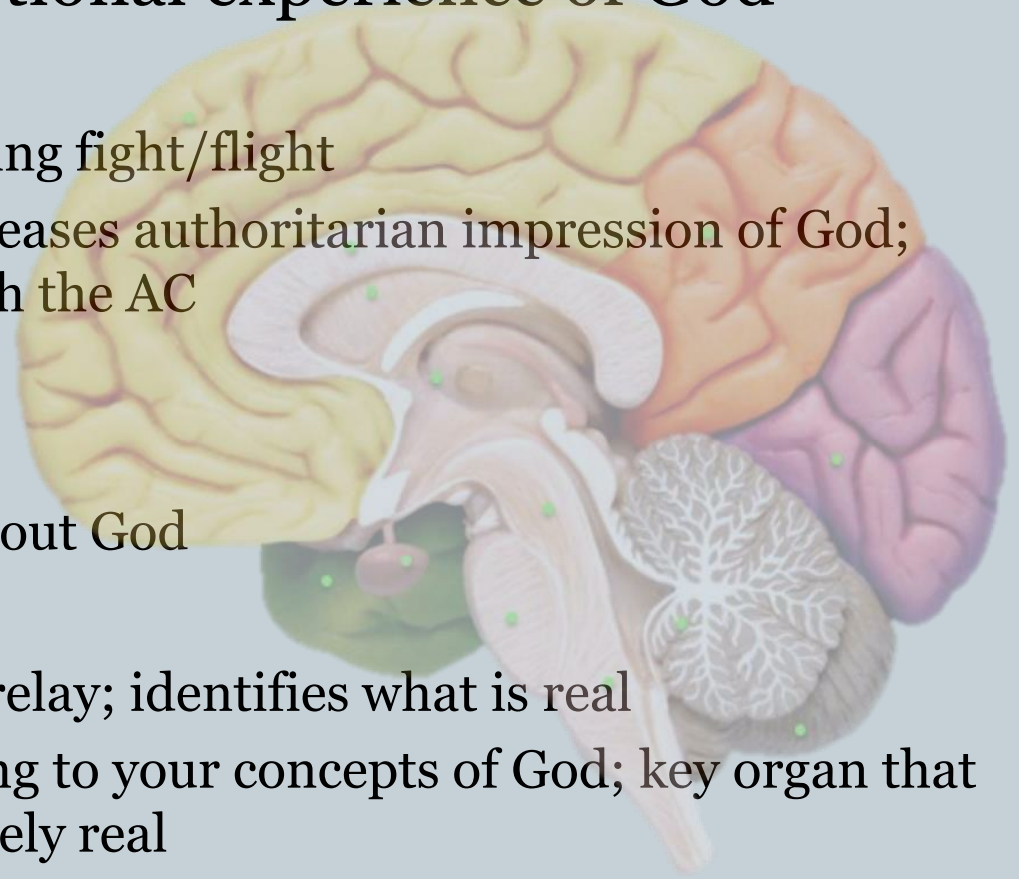


# Brain Anatomy and Functions

(How we relate to God)



- Limbic system – emotional experience of God
  - Amygdala
    - ✦ Seat of emotion regulating fight/flight
    - ✦ Increased activity- increases authoritarian impression of God; inverse relationship with the AC
  - Hippocampus
    - ✦ Memory is stored
    - ✦ Stores what we learn about God
  - Thalamus
    - ✦ Sensory processor and relay; identifies what is real
    - ✦ Gives emotional meaning to your concepts of God; key organ that makes God feel objectively real



# Neuroscience Studies



- **Centering Prayer Meditation – Nuns**
  - Decreased activity in the Parietal lobe
  - Increased activity in the Frontal lobes
  - Increased activity in the Anterior Cingulate
  - “Asymmetrical” activity in the Thalamus

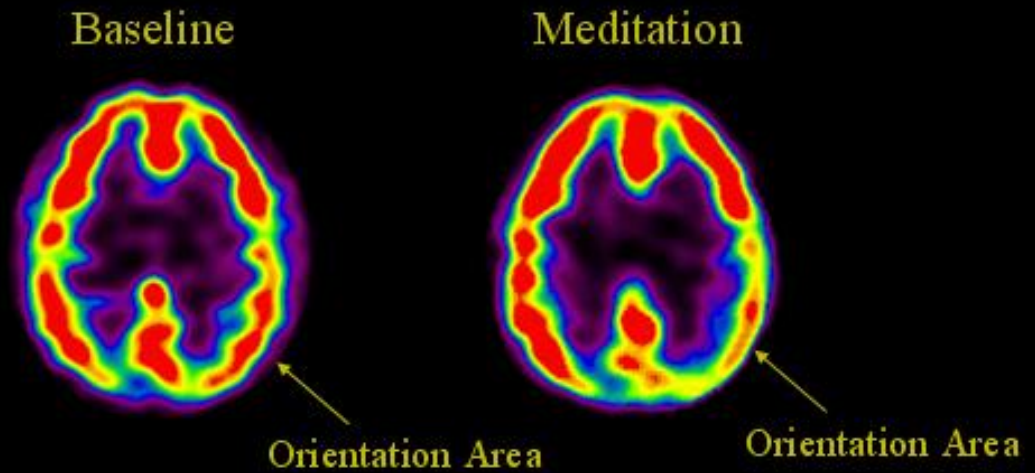
Skyler Gerald@skylgeraldphoto



# Meditation

(Visual Practice)

## SPECT Images at Baseline and During Meditation



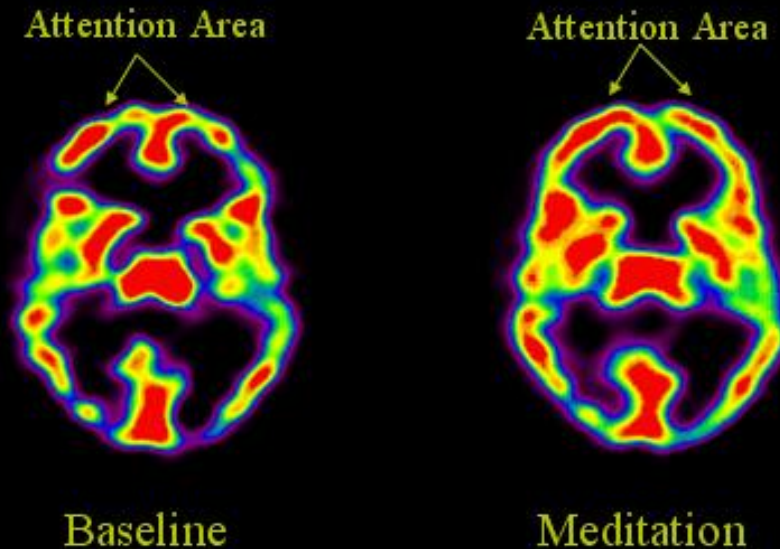
**Decreased activity in the parietal lobes during meditation is shown here in yellow.**  
**Image credit: Dr. Andrew Newberg**

**SPECT- Single Photon Emission Computed Tomography**

# Meditation

(Centering  
Prayer)

## SPECT Images at Baseline and During Meditation



**Decreased activity in the parietal lobes during meditation is shown here in yellow.**  
**Image credit: Dr. Andrew Newberg**

**SPECT- Single Photon Emission Computed Tomography**

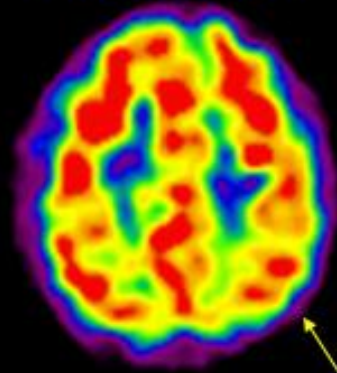


# Meditation

(Stillness in  
God's presence)

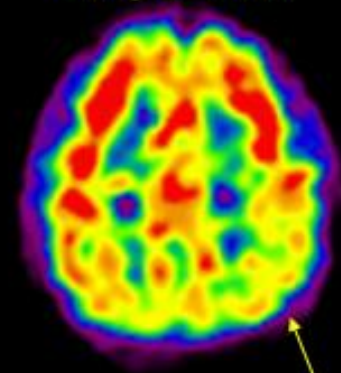
## Comparison of Baseline to Prayer

Baseline Scan



Superior  
Parietal Lobe

Prayer Scan



Superior  
Parietal Lobe

**Decreased activity in the parietal lobes during meditation is shown here in yellow.**  
**Image credit: Dr. Andrew Newberg**

**SPECT- Single Photon Emission Computed Tomography**

# Meditate on and Pray in Truth



## If You Don't Believe...

**FINALLY, BRETHREN,  
WHATEVER THINGS ARE  
TRUE, NOBLE,  
JUST, PURE,  
LOVELY, OF  
GOOD REPORT,  
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE  
AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING  
PRAISEWORTHY  
MEDITATE ON THESE THINGS.**

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

© MYBIBLE.COM

- Lack of neural activity
- Cognitive dissonance
- Damage to the Anterior Cingulate
- Hyperactive Amygdala

# Benefits



## Chemical

- Increase in dopamine
- Increase in serotonin
- Increase in GABA
- Reduction in stress hormones

## Somatic

- Decrease Oxygen consumption
- Decrease Respiratory rate
- Decrease heart rate
- Decrease in blood pressure

# ...even More Scripture Support



- “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; **meditate** on it day and night...” Joshua 1:8
- “...but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who **meditates** on his law day and night.” Psalm 1:2
- “Be **still**, and know that I am God;” Psalm 46:10
- “may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to **know** this love that surpasses knowledge...” Ephesians 3:19

# Barriers to Selfness and Selfcare



**WHERE DO YOU SPEND YOUR TIME AND ENERGY?**

**24/7=10,080; 8HR =3,360; DIFF = 6,720**

**112 HR PER WEEK**

# Practical Application



**A SYSTEM APPROACH**

# Christian Meditation Examples

- The Centering Prayer
- Compassion Communication

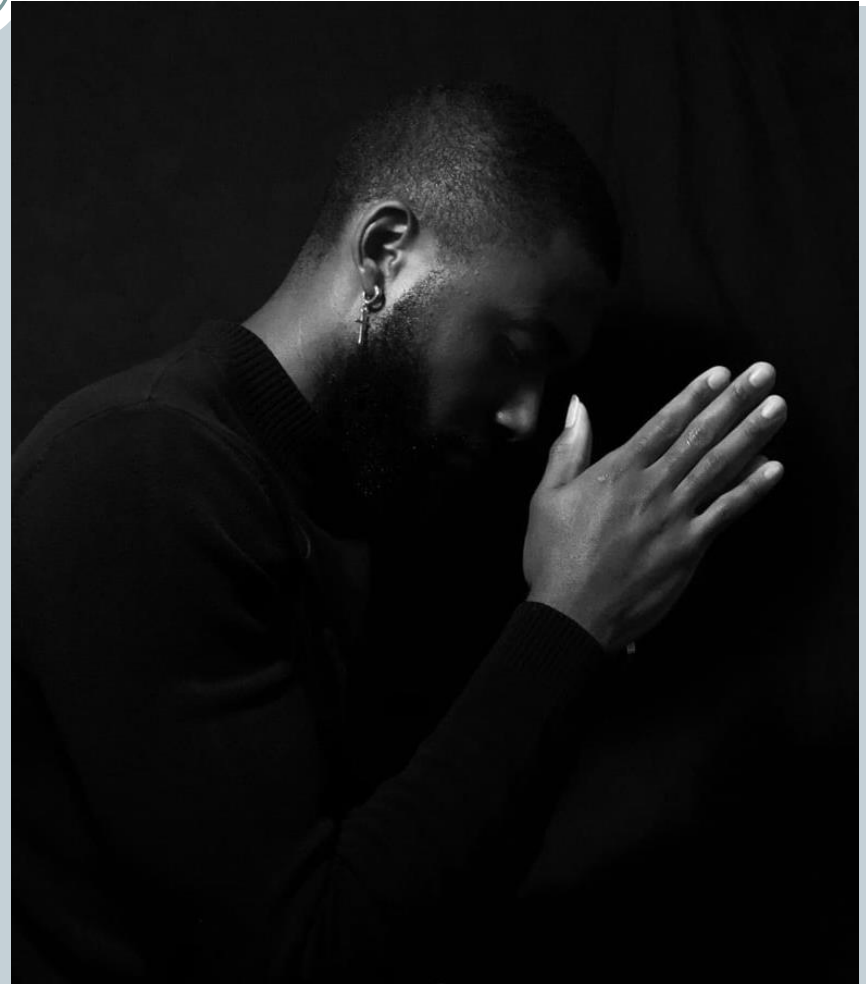


Photo by: Marquise Kamanke

# Centering Prayer



- Identify what your objective is (inner peace, experiencing compassion for others, receiving the gift of God's presence) Or, select a scripture.
- Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and breathe slowly and deeply until all of your tensions are gone
- Now focus on the selected point of contemplation (do not repeat any words or expressions to yourself. Just be aware of all the thoughts, perceptions, feelings, images, and memories that your contemplation evokes.)
- Notice how you are feeling
- Now bring yourself back to your objective and notice what thoughts and feelings emerge
- If you mind wanders, slowly breathe and allow your mind to refocus back on your objective or scripture
- If the object becomes vague or disappears simply watch what happens next. Don't "do" anything or "make" anything happen. Let the objective/contemplation work on you.



# Compassion Communication



- **Starter Exercise – Partner exercise**
  - Take a deep slow breath and consciously allow your muscles to relax
  - Yawn several times
    - ✦ Introduce yourselves to your partner
    - ✦ Notice something positive about your partner
  - Verbal interaction - Speak slowly, slow breathes, while quietly focusing on your relaxed muscles
    - ✦ Start by talking about your love for God our Father and Jesus Christ – in short intervals, taking turns, and slow-deeper breathes between speaking
    - ✦ Stay focused on your relaxed muscles and body while talking
    - ✦ Notice the positive quality or attribute about your partner while sharing
    - ✦ Continue sharing and notice the good feelings and thoughts

# Questions?

