



WAY OF LIFE | PRACTICE TOOLKIT

STILLING SHARED SILENCE

INTRODUCTION

◆ Background

This *Stilling* practice is outlining a contemplative, silent form of gathered prayer; moving away from more active and wordy kinds of prayer into a place of resting in God. It is not intended to replace our other ways of praying together, but to deepen and underpin them. Silent prayer has been part of the Church's tradition since the earliest days, though it has often been more pronounced within Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. Within the Protestant tradition, the Quakers are an example of a denomination where meetings are framed around prayerful silence.

◆ Summary of the practice

When we gather for Shared Silence, we simply dedicate time to sit in the presence of God. We find a space that is comfortable, whether sitting on a chair or kneeling on a prayer stool. If you are able, maintaining good posture will be helpful. It is important to acknowledge we might initially be worried to enter silence, wondering what might be disclosed. We can also be put off by our 'wandering mind'. Rather than fighting our thoughts, can we embrace ourselves with all our fears and distractions and try to gently bring ourselves back to God's love for us in Christ?

◆ Ways to use the practice

Though this practice has often been thought of in solitary terms, silent forms of prayer thrive well in communal settings. This practice can be integrated into a service or meeting, or be the sole focus of a gathering.

Coming together for Shared Silence can help us persevere when the silence feels challenging, foster a sense of belonging to the Body of Christ and be an intimate and bonding experience. As in an orchestra, each person's tune becomes part of a symphony of silence.

◆ Time

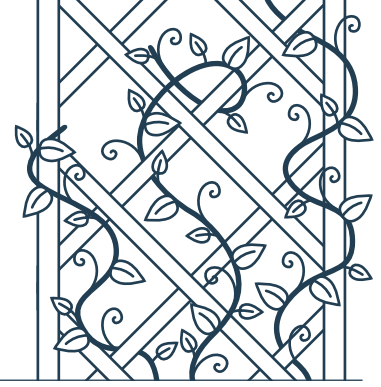
Shared Silence could be as short as 30 seconds to a minute with our children, 1-2 minutes to break up a meeting or 5-10 minutes as part of a daily prayer routine. Some groups spend as much as an hour in prayerful silence.

It will be helpful to find ways to prioritise and schedule this type of prayer, as silence is often the first thing to get squashed from our busy timetables.



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OUTLINE

1 Prepare

Designate one person to hold the space for this shared time of silence, including leading the opening and closing prayer and to keep an eye on the time. Decide how long you will spend in silent prayer together and keep to this time. It might help to read through the steps below, before starting your time of Shared Silence.

2 Settle

To help everyone settle and focus, you might light a candle as a reminder of God's presence. Mark the start of the silence with an opening prayer. You can use the following prayer, saying the words in bold together:

God who stills, hear our prayer.

As we contemplate your presence,
may we be still and know that you are God.

When our thoughts try to take over,
may we return to the still centre.

Help us to rest in you,

and know that we are loved.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

You might want to spend some time focusing on your breathing, becoming aware of its natural rhythm, not forcing anything; breathing out any heavy or difficult feelings you might be carrying, and breathing in God's deep and unconditional love.

3 Stay

Thoughts, feelings, and outside distractions will emerge. This is normal! Notice them but don't engage them in conversation. Take a friendly attitude towards them; try and let go of them by placing them in the hands of Christ so that you can make space for stillness and silence.

It can sometimes help to take a word or a phrase of prayer that you can return to when your thoughts take over like 'Come Holy Spirit' or 'Lord, have mercy on me' or 'Jesus'. You could also hold something in your hand, like a holding cross, stone or fidget toy. Or simply take a few deep breaths and gently remind yourself of God's love for you in Christ.

4 Emerge

At the end of your time of silence, close with a song, scripture reading or prayer of gratitude for God's presence and love in your life. Spend a few moments noticing what was going on within.

Remember that the outcome of practising silent prayer will often be experienced more in daily life, than during the practice itself.