

WEEK ONE • DAY ONE

MINDFULNESS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES—WHY PRACTICE?

“SQUIRREL!”

Let everyone be quick to listen,
slow to speak, slow to anger.

James 1:19 (NRSV)

DISTRACTED **16**

Bethany Acker, 24 [Plover, Wisconsin]

Trying to have a conversation with people who are distracted by their phone or the TV bugs me. I don't like talking when no one is actually listening, especially when I am trying to say something that is important to me.

Yet, I often find *myself* distracted during conversations. Sometimes I don't pay enough attention when someone is talking to me. I want to be less distracted and more focused on those who need me. We would all be better off if we listened more often and more fully. <

practice mindfulness:

Sometimes I have trouble paying attention. So when I am trying to listen, I consistently check in with myself: *Has my mind wandered?* If it has, I acknowledge that and gently move my attention back to the subject at hand or follow up with the person I failed to listen to. What can you do to pay attention more fully? What difference could it make?

Michelle Ankrum, 20
[Marshalltown, Iowa]

july 15–21

JULY>AUGUST 2019 **21**

WEEK ONE • DAY TWO

MINDFULNESS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES—WHY PRACTICE?

Learning to Be with Me

Chris Hughes

My older sister Sylvia and I had different styles of studying. She was neat and organized, and she needed peace and quiet so she could concentrate. Sylvia hated to be distracted . . . especially by me.

One afternoon, Sylvia was studying in her room; and I was studying—in my own way—in my room. I had the stereo going full blast while I lay on the bottom bunk, playing along with the music by drumming on the slats on my brother’s bed above me. My biology book was lying open across my face, which made it a little hard to sing. (We were studying osmosis, so I figured I’d let the information just seep into my brain.)

I guess Sylvia got a little distracted by my “studying.” She burst into my room, hand on hip and finger pointed in my direction, “Do you know why you can’t be still?” she shouted. I pulled the book off my head and spun around to hit her with a pillow. But she had a look on her face that I’d only seen a few times. It said, “This is serious. I love you. Cool it.”

So I put down the pillow, turned down the music, and said, “No, why can’t I be still?” She said, “You can’t be still because when you’re still, you think about things you don’t want to think about. You worry about Mom and Dad finding out some of the things I know you’ve done. You wonder if Mom will get divorced again. You worry about what your friends think of you, and you’re afraid that the girl you want to go out with won’t go. You worry that you won’t be able to get around every teacher by being cute and entertaining.”

And then she said, “You don’t like to be with you very much.”

“Excuse me?”

“You don’t like to be with you very much. That’s why you can’t be still. If *you* don’t like to be with you, how do you expect *me* to like it?”

And she left.

What she had said was so true and so deep that I did what I usually did. I turned up the stereo full blast and beat the slats under my brother’s bed until the drumsticks broke and tears ran down my face.



WEEK ONE • DAY TWO

MINDFULNESS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES—WHY PRACTICE?

Two passages from the Bible came together for me the summer after Sylvia's visit to my noisy room. In Psalm 46:10 God invited me to "Be still, and know that I am God." And I was assured by 1 John 4:18 that God's "perfect love drives out fear." My pastor and my youth group helped me experience stillness as a gift rather than as a punishment, something to seek rather than something to avoid.

I learned to "be with me" without feeling alone or afraid because the one who knows me best and loves me most is always with me. I figured if God could stand to be with me, I could learn to like it.

Dig Deeper

Read and reflect on 1 John 4:16-19.

What does the phrase "perfect love drives out fear" mean for your life right now?

WEEK ONE • DAY THREE

MINDFULNESS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES—WHY PRACTICE?

BE STILL

WEEKEND!

TAYLOR GERLACH

learning 24 to be still

To be honest, I am far from an expert on “being still.” You will rarely find me sleeping in on the weekend or binge-watching Netflix. I like to stay busy and active, and our culture encourages this hectic lifestyle by glorifying productivity.

Being involved isn't a bad thing; it keeps me challenged and excited about each new day. Stretching myself too thin and not programming down time, however, leaves me out of touch with life and even my own emotions. I begin to feel overwhelmed and unable to connect with others around me.

I have found that taking a step back allows me to enjoy everything I have going on much more. Thankfully, I've been able to make room for a few simple changes that help me—and I hope you—to be more intentional about being still throughout the day.

- 1. Schedule your first appointment of the day with the Lord.** Make morning prayer time a habit. Mornings can be busy as we rush to get ready and out the door, so focus on consistency. A few minutes each day is better than one huge chunk of time, which isn't always feasible. Commit to having a conversation with God every morning and watch how those few minutes can affect your heart for the rest of the day.

60 JANUARY>FEBRUARY 2018

february 19–25

WEEK ONE • DAY THREE

MINDFULNESS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES—WHY PRACTICE?

BE STILL

WEEKEND!

- 2. Plan a time every day to refocus.** Classes, meetings, chores, jobs, and practices can distract us and leave us feeling overwhelmed. Creating a time to switch gears in the middle of the craziness has helped me refocus for the rest of the day. I use my study hall period at school to read a book that helps me grow in my knowledge of who God is and who I am as God's child. I curl up on a couch, turn on my favorite praise playlist, tune out my crazy environment, and start learning. If you don't want to read, you can watch a video, listen to a podcast, discover scripture, or read **devozine's** daily devotion after completing homework assignments or before sports practice. Find a time that works for you to stop and refocus in the middle of your day.
- 3. Take a break from social media when needed.** When I feel really disconnected from face-to-face relationships and even from myself, I turn off my devices for a little bit. I love technology's ability to connect me instantly with the world, but sometimes I need to focus on cultivating deeper connections rather than constant, widespread, sometimes superficial ones. Whether it's one afternoon or a week or more, take as much time away as you need to connect more deeply with those around you.
- 4. Create an intentional time to meet with friends without an agenda.** Relationships are built out of spontaneous, honest conversation. You can't force connections and intimacy; you make room for them. Every week, I meet two of my best friends to talk about life, our prayer requests, and anything else on our hearts. We don't have a planned agenda; we simply enjoy each other's presence. Our time together is a highlight of my week because I get to slow down and be real with friends who guide me in my walk with the Lord. Focus on building relationships in the moment; make room for authentic connection to grow by being spontaneous and real.
- 5. Learn how and when to say no.** This one is hard for me. I'm quick to agree to fill any need someone presents to me, and my schedule soon overflows. Pick and choose what you're passionate about so that you can focus your attention on those high priority activities. <

Taylor Gerlach, 19, is a freshman at the University of Georgia. When she's not being still, she loves to compete in CrossFit, swim, play guitar, and find the best taco restaurants.

25 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Listen to "Breathe" by Jonny Diaz. The verses are really fast and chaotic like our lives normally are, but the chorus reminds us to "just breathe; just be" and to rest in the arms of God.

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JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2018 **61**

WEEK ONE • DAY FOUR

MINDFULNESS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES—WHY PRACTICE?

WHAT IS PRAYER?

WEEKEND!

SALLY CHAMBERS

Prayer: The Secret of Life

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When asked, “What is the secret of life?” Mother Teresa answered, “Prayer.” When I heard this, I was puzzled. Seriously? *Prayer: the secret of life?* For me, prayer consisted of a list of names in a notebook and words or phrases offered in need and in thanksgiving. Prayer was an activity of the mind—thoughts and words spoken to God. But the secret of life? I must be missing something.

FROM HEAD TO HEART

I began a journey to uncover the secret of prayer—and apparently life. As I did, my prayers began to move from my head to my heart. I was figuring out that words helped to form our prayers, but words were only the tip of the iceberg. Prayer was deeper and richer under the surface.

INTO GOD'S PRESENCE

Gradually, prayer became more of a place than an activity. I began to experience prayer as a way of sitting with God, of being in God's presence. For me, prayer was like stepping into a hot tub where I could rest and relax.

26 NOV>DEC 2013

november 18–24

WEEK ONE • DAY FOUR

MINDFULNESS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES—WHY PRACTICE?

WHAT IS PRAYER?

WEEKEND!

Eugene Peterson once said, “When we pray, we immerse ourselves in the living presence of God.” I created a space in my room, with a chair, a candle, and a cross. I could step into this space to pray, as if I were stepping into the presence of God. Before I formulated any words to speak or to write in my journal, I closed my eyes, breathed deeply, and imagined turning my heart toward God.

LIVING IN HD

Turning toward God in prayer transformed not only my praying but also my living. I began to use a new metaphor when I thought about prayer. TV programming is always playing, whether or not we have the TV on. In the same way, God is always speaking and always present. Prayer enables us to tune in to what God is saying and where God is playing. Maybe Mother Teresa was onto something. Maybe prayer enables us to be open to fully living because prayer opens us to God, the source of life.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux said, “Prayer, for me, is simply a raising of the heart, a simple glance towards Heaven, an expression of love.” I began to realize that no matter what else I was doing, I could also be praying. If I were tossing a Frisbee, walking among the azaleas, being quiet, reading, writing, drawing, sharing a meal, enjoying conversation over coffee, or driving to work, I also could be praying if my heart were turned toward God. I wrote on sticky notes the phrase “for the love of God” and posted the notes in my car, on my computer, beside my makeup. I spoke the words as I drove, typed, and got ready in the morning.

Brother Lawrence called bringing God into every aspect of our lives “practicing the presence of God.” Others call it prayer. I call it living life in high definition. <

Sally Chambers is uncovering more about the secret of life as she lives in HD in Nashville, Tennessee.

24 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Try these ways of praying:

- + Set an alarm on your phone to go off at the same time every day. Wherever you are when it goes off, stop, close your eyes, breathe deeply, and notice the sounds and smells of the world around you. Just be in the presence of God.
- + Choose one activity in your day (brushing your teeth, doing your homework, cleaning your room, playing with your siblings) and be intentional about doing it “for the love of God.” The more you practice the presence of God, inviting God to be part of everything you do, the more your life will become your prayer.

WEEK ONE • DAY FIVE AWARENESS OF YOUR BREATH

BREATHE

WEEKEND!

KASEY HITT

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PRACTICING YOUR ABREATHES

ARE YOU RUNNING FROM A BEAR? HOW ABOUT DROWNING AT SEA?

Probably not since you're reading this article. But stop and notice: Is your breathing shallow? Are you holding your breath? If so, your body actually *thinks* you're running away or drowning!

Maybe it's time to stop, come up for air, and breathe deeply.

We can easily get into a pattern of survival breathing. Do you ever feel as if your packed schedule is chasing you or that you are sinking in a sea of fear or worry? Your breathing will reflect it!

Shallow breathing or holding our breath activates in us the fight-flight-freeze response that leads to stress. Although stress can provide helpful energy at times (remember the bear?), being in constant stress leaves little room for us to receive a full breath of air, much less the fullness of life that Jesus talks about in John 10:10.

After rising from the dead, Jesus found his disciples in a state of fight-flight-freeze. Hiding behind locked doors, they were afraid the authorities would track them down and kill them as they had Jesus. So what did Jesus do? Instead of giving them a lecture on being lousy followers, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22).

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MAY>JUNE 2017 **37**

WEEK ONE • DAY FIVE

AWARENESS OF YOUR BREATH

BREATHE

WEEKEND!



Did you know that the word “Spirit” can also be translated as “breath” in biblical languages? It’s *ruach* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek. This holy breath is present at the very beginning, before God speaks and creates (Genesis 1:2). In fact, some Jewish scholars believe the Hebrew name of God, *YHWH*, cannot be spoken because it’s actually the sound of breathing! When the name is whispered—“Yod-Hey-Vav-Hey”—we can hear gentle breathing.

Back to the hiding place . . . In the presence of his followers, Jesus first models and then tells them what to do in a time of stress: “Receive the Holy Breath.” They are to breathe in God. Before scientific studies began proving it, Jesus knew that the breath of life could calm the fight-flight-freeze instinct. We could say that to breathe is a spiritual practice!

As the disciples did, we can allow ourselves to be calmed by the Comforter (a name Jesus used for the Spirit in John 14:26). As the disciples began breathing deeply, their fear subsided and they were better able to hear Jesus’ words and to follow his instructions for their next step out of hiding.

So it is with us. Once our survival instinct is calmed, we are able to hear and see God (and other people and things) in a way we couldn’t when we were running, drowning, or hiding.

Give this a little thought. Start noticing when you are holding your breath or barely breathing. Does it happen at a certain time of day or during a particular activity? Are you in public or around a certain person? I just caught myself holding my breath as I’m writing! I do that a lot when I’m on the computer. So it’s time for me to pause and receive the Breath of God right where I am. Yod-Hey-Vav-Hey . . . <

38 MAY>JUNE 2017

may 29–june 4

WEEK ONE • DAY FIVE

AWARENESS OF YOUR BREATH

BREATHE

WEEKEND!

Kasey Hitt is a scarf, ball, and club juggling spiritual director in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee. She likes to practice breathing while juggling, a metaphor for her life!

4 NEXT DAY STRETCH

BREATHING DEEPLY AS A WAY OF PRAYER

Whenever I'm told to take a deep breath, I find that it's a struggle, as if I'm trying to force more air into an already inflated balloon! Sometimes, we need to create space first. Here's a fun way to begin:

- + Put your hands on your belly.
- + For as long as you can, repeat the ABCs, count out loud, or quietly pretend you're blowing bubbles.
- + When you have no voice or breath left, watch what happens—an automatic deep belly breath! Did you feel it?

Exhaling fully creates space for air to fill your lungs and belly—a full, deep breath. Remember that noses are for breathing and mouths are for speaking (unless you have a cold). Breathe in through the filtering system God created and used to breathe life into the first human!

Practice breathing deeply for one minute. To create space, use one of the exercises above, or try giving a huge sigh of relief or exasperation. Then let the Holy Ruach come rushing in, bringing not only survival but also peace and so much more!

WEEK ONE • DAY SIX

AWARENESS OF YOUR BREATH

BREATHE

**“Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.”**

Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

BREATHING THE SCRIPTURE 2

Karissa Whitcomb-Tavey [Easley, South Carolina]

I have had asthma since I was a kid. To participate in the sports I loved, I needed to learn how to breath differently. My cross-country coach introduced me to yoga to help me calm my asthma attacks. I continued to run in high school and college; and as I practiced yoga’s relaxation and breathing techniques, I had fewer attacks and developed a better stride.

I also found a clearness of mind and a calmness I had not known before. Yoga allowed me to know the presence and voice of God in a new and amazing way. I now regularly use yoga and meditation to enjoy being with God. I often select a specific Bible verse and take it word by word, breathing in the life-giving truth of God and exhaling it into the world in a soft whisper. <



TRY IT: Start in a seated position, either on your knees or cross-legged, with your palms resting gently on your knees. As you inhale, breathe in the peace of God while meditating on the first part of Psalm 46:10; then exhale on the second half of the verse. You may want to start with an abbreviated version: Inhale as you say, “Be still.” Exhale as you say, “God will be exalted.” Finish by breathing in silence, listening for the voice of God and enjoying God’s presence.

36 MAY>JUNE 2017

may 29–june 4

WEEK ONE • DAY SEVEN

STRENGTHENING BODY, MIND, AND SPIRIT

CORE POWER

WEEKEND!

STEVE MATTHEWS

core 11 power

If you've ever been to a gym, taken an exercise class, or played a sport, you've probably done your share of sit-ups. Sit-ups are one way to strengthen our "core"—muscles in the abdomen, hips, pelvis, and back. Fitness experts agree that having a strong core improves our balance and makes it easier to increase strength and flexibility in other parts of our body.

I would like to have a strong core and a six-pack—without all the sit-ups. Of course, if I want to meet my fitness goals, practice and commitment are essential. Practice and commitment are also important in my spiritual life.

Strength, flexibility, balance—these words used to describe the benefits of a strong core might also be used to describe the benefits of consistent spiritual practice. God does not love us less if we fail to

achieve perfection in our faith, but I find that I am a more joyful and generous person when I am attending to God's movement in my life. When I respond to God in life-giving ways, I am more balanced, strong, and flexible—more myself.

44 JULY>AUGUST 2018

august 6–12

WEEK ONE • DAY SEVEN

STRENGTHENING BODY, MIND, AND SPIRIT

CORE POWER

WEEKEND!

strengthening our spiritual core

What habits or practices might help us develop a sturdier spiritual core? In Christianity (and in other religions), several practices appear rather consistently. These include sabbath-keeping, worshipping (both privately and communally), and building a community of trusted guides and companions.

Sabbath-keeping is more than going to church. Sabbath time is holy rest—not only rest from secular activities, but also resting in a deep awareness of God's presence in our lives.

During times of sabbath, we set a different rhythm that restores us in body and soul.

Worship is another practice that develops a spiritual core. Communal worship reminds us that we are more than individuals. When we come together in prayer and praise around the table, we find God in one another and in our communion. Jesus also reminds us that private worship is important. He often withdrew alone to deserted places to pray (Luke 5:16).

Finally, we all need trusted companions to hold us accountable for practicing our faith, to encourage us, and to nudge us toward God's love. <

Steve Matthews was a youth minister for over 15 years. He is now a spiritual director, a coach working with redeveloping churches, and Executive Director of the South Coast Mission Hub, a collaborative of churches sponsored by the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts.

12 NEXT DAY STRETCH

What practices help you develop your spiritual core, making you more balanced, strong, and flexible? Which of these practices come easy? Which ones feel more strenuous?

Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10, NRSV). Sometimes God's abundance is obvious to us. But our core power helps us to see hidden graces even amid hardship. By strengthening our spiritual core, we increase our awareness of God's love, making us more responsive to God's invitations and better able to receive and be transformed by God's abundant love.

During the next week, commit to two "core power" practices—one that comes easily, and one that is more challenging. Notice how focusing on your core power affects other areas of your life. Consider sharing your experience with a friend or mentor.