

**Tustin Presbyterian Church Orange, Feb 2018**

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author of *Open Your Eyes: Toward Living More Deeply in the Present*

**Week 1: Introduction to Mindfulness as Prayer**

**Living in God's "Presence"**

"Jesus dwells consciously in the Presence of God." (from *Open Your Eyes*, Ch. 2)

*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. (Mk. 1:35)*

We can understand God as *Presence* – noting the many biblical references to God as *being*, *breath*, or *spirit*.

The practice of *Mindfulness* is a practice that helps us to learn to live in the present. This practice is today being supported by scientific studies showing we can "train our brain" to be less anxious and more present. Mindfulness is also drawn from ancient traditions of meditation and Christian contemplative prayer – simply sitting in the Presence of God.

Diana Winston (UCLA) defines mindfulness as *paying attention to present moment experiences with openness, curiosity, & a willingness to be with what is*. The goal of mindfulness meditation is simply to become aware of all that is happening in the present. We are often living but not very aware of each moment. We can learn to approach the present moment with curiosity, acceptance and grace.

*Anchors* help to center us in the present. These include bringing attention to our *breath*, or *sounds*, or *sights*, or the *touch* of our feet on the ground as we walk. If you would like to begin "training your brain" to be aware of the Present, you might try doing any of these on a daily basis.

**Daily exercises:**

1. Experiment with a time/place so you can sit for 5+ minutes daily –
  - a. iTunesU Chapman University: Mindfulness Meditation with Sound Healing – *Mindfulness of Breath* <https://itunes.apple.com/us/course/id1198270572>
  - b. *Breathing meditation* (5 min.) on the UCLA MARC site <http://marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations>
  - c. [www.gailstearns.com](http://www.gailstearns.com) homepage: 5-minute *Breath* meditation
2. STOP exercise:
  - Stop what you are doing
  - Take a breath
  - Observe anything you notice – thoughts, sensations, emotions
  - Proceed

**Take a Mindfulness break anytime:**

1. Close your eyes and take 5 deep, slow breaths.
2. occasionally eat mindfully in silence – with full attention to taste
3. Take a mindful walk

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**Week 2: Living Mindfully**

**Living with Grace and Kindness**

As we live more fully in the presence of God, *We begin to be gentle with ourselves and to give ourselves care.* (from *Open Your Eyes*, Ch. 3) *If we take living in the Present seriously, we will see the world not through our doctrines of judgment ... but with compassion.* (Ch. 7)

This is true grace: full acceptance of our life, and fully living each present moment. The wonder of our life is that *every moment is new*. In Christ, all things are new! We are never living a past moment, and the future is not yet here. This moment always presents a place to start over – with grace, forgiveness and kindness. We begin with ourselves, and then our compassion will extend to others.

- Continue to “train your brain” with guided meditations, or simply set your alarm for a 5 or 10 minute time of silence.
- Take a mindful walk
- Eat mindfully
- Practice STOP

Try ending your prayers or meditations with kindness, to increase your practice of compassion. As you finish your sessions, offer yourself and others some words of kindness, such as:

Pray slowly:

May I be happy

May I be at ease

May I be healthy in body and mind

May I be safe and protected from danger

May I be at peace

Repeat this prayer by substituting *he, she* or *they* for “I” – perhaps with someone you love or even have difficulty with in mind.

Repeat this prayer for groups of people, or all people, such as:

May all people, and all beings be happy

May we all be at ease

May we all be healthy in body and mind

May we all be safe and protected from danger

May we all know peace.

**OPTIONAL DAILY ACTIVITIES:**

- Use an “anchor” – such as breath, or feeling your feet touch the ground, or listening - to be aware of the present.
- At the end of each day, write a list of 5 things you are grateful for.
- Stop and just listen, hearing as many sounds as you can. Notice how we are not even aware of the sounds around us as they are happening.
- Anytime you are waiting, like standing in line or for any other reason, use that time to find an “anchor” and make yourself aware of the present moment.
- Try taking a break from media (turn off your phone, t.v., etc). Do something instead that you can really focus on with your hands or body, like exercise or dance or drawing.
- Do simple acts of kindness, anonymously, for others throughout one day.
- Become aware of trees. Look closely at textures, colors, sizes, etc.
- Be aware of the bottoms of your feet as you walk – sensing coolness, warmth, pressure, etc.
- Each time you receive a text message or a phone call, pause for a few seconds and take a breath before you look at it or answer it.
- Eat mindfully!

More exercises can be found in *How to Train a Wild Elephant* by Jan Chozen Bays

Mindfulness Sources:

**Secular – finding peace:**

Jan Chozen Bays, How to Train a Wild Elephant

Jill Bolte Taylor, My Stroke of Insight

Jeffrey Brantley, Calming Your Anxious Mind: How Mindfulness & Compassion can Free You from Anxiety, Fear & Panic

Jon Kabat-Zinn, Full Catastrophe Living

Jon Kabat-Zinn, Coming to our Senses

See also mindfulness cd's available on [www.mindfulnesscds.com](http://www.mindfulnesscds.com)

Eckhart Tolle, The Power of Now

Eckhart Tolle, A New Earth: Awakening to your Life's Purpose

Byron Katie, Loving What Is

Byron Katie, I Need your Love – Is That True?

**Islam/ Sufi:**

Kabir Helminski, Living Presence

**Buddhist:**

Tara Brach, Radical Acceptance: Embracing your Life with the Heart of a Buddha

The Dalai Lama, How to Practice: The Way to a Meaningful Life

His Holiness The Dalai Lama & Howard C. Cutler, The Art of happiness: A Handbook for Living

Pema Chodron, Comfortable with Uncertainty

Pema Chodron, When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times

(see other works by Chodron as well)

**Jewish:**

Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Sabbath

**Christian:**

Jim Burklo, Mindful Christianity (2017)

Thomas Moore, Care of the Soul: a Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life

Thomas Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel

Check out Father Keating on the web for dvd series on [snowmass.org/keating.htm](http://snowmass.org/keating.htm)

Bradley Hanson, The Call of Silence: Discovering Christian Meditation

Bradley Hanson, Teach Us To Pray: Overcoming Obstacles to Daily Prayer

Gail Stearns, Open Your Eyes: Toward Living More Deeply in the Present

**Science:**

Susan Smalley & Diana Winston, The Science & Art of Mindfulness

B. Allan Wallace, Embracing Mind: The Common Ground of Science & Spirituality

Daniel Siegel, The Mindful Brain

(see other works by Siegel as well)

Richard Hanson, Buddha's Brain: The Neuroscience of Happiness, Love & Wisdom

Richard Hanson, Hardwiring Happiness

Richard Hanson, Meditations to Train Your Brain