

Mindfulness and Faith



"Be still, and know that I am God." - Psalm 46:10

Like the psalmist and Elijah in the cave (1 Kings 19), we have to be still and become actively aware of God's presence in our lives. If our minds and hearts are oriented elsewhere in the midst of our busy lives, we may overlook the still small whisper. One way to cultivate this discipline is to practice awareness and presence, which could be summed up in one word: mindfulness.

In general, mindfulness is understood as intentionally focusing your attention on the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Most approaches center on breathing or carefully observing surroundings. More than a way to calm down, mindful practices can benefit our well-being as they improve emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal functions, reduce self-consciousness, and decrease fear of judgment (Brown et al., 2007; Sedlmeier et al., 2012). This is critical for young people, as today, many of them struggle with depression and anxiety (WHO, 2021). Furthermore, research suggests that in general, embodied, activity-based, health-promoting interventions positively impact youth, especially when drawing on aspects of social-emotional learning, self-awareness, and relational skills (Connelly, 2023). Embodied activities that connect body/mind/spirit are also directly tied to one's sense of self (Connelly, 2023). Taken as a whole, this suggests that by explicitly bringing awareness of the body and self into faith practices, our students can experience not only more intentional faith practices but also develop a holistic spiritual life that encourages their sense of self to be rooted in Christ.

Thus, intentional, faith-based awareness practices can develop a more holistic view of God, others, and the self. Though this may sound daunting, introducing this with students does not have to look entirely "new"; it can be as simple as bringing awareness into pre-existing practices through one moment of intentional preparation. This moment can help transform a potentially passive experience into something alive and active, breathing new life into our spiritual disciplines.

Mindful Faith Practices:

- Practice belovedness and communal awareness through guided spiritual affirmations (see other handout for guidance).
- Before beginning a common spiritual practice - prayer, worship, scripture reading - take one full minute to breathe. Close your eyes and focus on the present, slowing the pace of your mind and body. Allow this time to bring awareness of the body being present in this moment and acknowledge that God is present. Remind yourself that this is holy ground, for God is here. Once ready, proceed with your practice.
- Take a walk around your home, your church, your neighborhood, and intentionally look/listen for the presence of God around you.
- Turn on peaceful music, dim the lights, and close your eyes. Imagine a safe space... rest here for a few minutes. *What does this space look like? How does it feel?* Now, imagine that God is with you. *How does God appear? Does he speak or do anything? What does he call you?* Beloved, son/daughter, worthy, cherished... Rest for a few more minutes in this space.
- Draw a contained space (circle or square) and "brain dump," listing everything on your mind. Then, pick one thing to focus on as you pray to God through intentional journaling.

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