

## Mindfulness: It's the New Old thing!

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From the website of Psychology Today: *"Mindfulness is a state of active, open attention on the present. When you're mindful, you observe your thoughts and feelings from a distance, without judging them good or bad. Instead of letting your life pass you by, mindfulness means living in the moment and awakening to experience."*

Mindfulness – the quality of being present – is essential for living a God-sensitive life. But there is nothing explicitly Christian about mindfulness. It is practiced in many other religious traditions. It's been around forever, although it's been called by different names: attentiveness, focus, presence. Now mindfulness has hit the self-help sections of the big box booksellers and even corporate boardrooms. Everyone's into mindfulness.

Last year, the WomenSpirit group read Brian McLaren's book *Naked Spirituality*. McLaren uses twelve single words to describe twelve Christian faith practices. As you grow in faith, you move from one to the next to the next, often cycling back around, multiple times. The first of the words that McLaren gives us – the foundational one – is "Here". He quotes Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, "...if you do not find God here, is it useless to go and search elsewhere because it is not God that is absent from us, it is we who are absent from God..."

What's the opposite of mindfulness? Distraction? Absent-mindedness? Numbness? We know all those states of mind. Too often we live in the past, troubled by regret, wishing things were different. Or else we live in the future, frantically planning our next steps, and anticipating our worst fears. It seems that we have to work harder and harder to actually BE in the time and place where we find ourselves!

If God is always present with us – and God is – then the only place we can be with God is in the present, because the present is the only place we can be. For us who are trying to live more deeply into relationship with our living God, learning to be present to God and to ourselves is vital. (that doesn't mean it's easy!). After all, how can we become aware of the steady but subtle movement of God's Spirit in our lives, if we never pay attention to what's really going on?

The best way I know to become fully present is to use your senses, and breathe. When you realize that you're not fully present (the first step!), check out all five of your senses, slowly. Really look at what you can see. Feel the place where your body is, listen deeply to what's around you, taste your food and take several slow, easy breaths. Remind yourself, "I am here. God is here. God and I are here together."

This place where you are right now is where God meets you with God's love and grace. In every time and circumstance, you have the opportunity to be in tune with what God is doing in you, and in the world around you. It's called mindfulness. Give it a try.