

LivingIntegrated®

FIFTEEN PRACTICES FOR LIVING THE LIFE YOU WANT

12 MINDFULNESS

IN THIS PRACTICE:

- The Three Cords of Interior Integration
- Intentionality
- Awareness
- Acceptance
- Strengthen Your Inner Observer
- Practice Twelve Assignment

Go to <https://youtu.be/cK0v7o22u6U> now and watch the introductory video for this Practice.

I hear friends sometimes say things like, ‘gee I wish I’d bought stock in Microsoft’ or ‘if only I’d invested in Amazon’ and I understand what they mean. I wish I’d bought stock in Mindfulness (there is no such thing I don’t think).

Mindfulness has blown up. You hear the term everywhere now.

Like prayer, which we discussed in the last Practice, and meditation, which we will in the next, there are a significant number of resources on the topic of mindfulness. This Practice introduces the topic and gives you some things to think about and do as you work it into your life of recovery.

THREE CORDS OF INTERIOR INTEGRATION

I think that cultivating a lifestyle of regularly engaging in all three—prayer, mindfulness and meditation—is extraordinarily helpful in pulling together our brain and soul scatteredness so that we can increasingly live from a coherent center.

If prayer is a conversation with our Creator, mindfulness is the essential practice of becoming fully aware of the conversation within ourselves.

While there are many resources today to help with cultivating mindfulness, there is no one perfect way to do it.

Effective mindfulness practice always includes three essential elements: intentionality, awareness and acceptance.

INTENTIONALITY

Those of us who compulsively struggle with fractured thinking. Now to some degree everyone does. It's a particular struggle, though, when our lives are burdened with compulsive behaviors.

For those of us who've become addicts, much of the motivation that drove us to addictive living was avoiding pain and uncomfortable emotions. If we're compulsively engaging in sexual thinking and behaviors, we are dissociating from what is going on in the moment.

We separate our conscious awareness from current reality and escape to somewhere else. And because of how neurochemistry works, even if our lusting is in fantasy only, a part of our brain actually feels like we are somewhere else. Escape as illusion can work, if only for a while.

But it comes with consequences: we experience an altered sense of reality which is not sustainable, we reshape our character to fit our new idols, we pile up consequences from our selfish behavior and we miss out on the moment God has given us.

“ *Mindfulness is a conscious choice to work at living in the present and dealing with current reality.* ”

Though it's an enormous challenge requiring hard work, it bears tremendous rewards.

We have to make a decision, and come back to it repeatedly, that we want to do the work required to increase our mindfulness. We have to be willing to do whatever it takes.

We are wise to revisit and renew this intent daily.

AWARENESS

Effective mindfulness requires us to become increasingly aware of what we *think*, what we're *feeling*, what we're *doing* and what we're *sensing*.

Our thoughts are like clouds moving overhead. Sometimes big, ponderous, slow-moving clouds. Other times fast-moving wisps. Note them, the thoughts going through your mind. Be aware of them.

Being aware of them isn't the same as letting them camp out. Don't get stuck. Some thoughts can be let go of instantly. Others warrant some consideration. Sort them out but don't get mired down.

If you find yourself going round and round with obsessional thinking, call a time out. Ask yourself what this is all about. Is there something you need to pay attention to? Something you need to do?

If the answers are no, then calm your own mind with resolution to let these thoughts go. Journaling can be very helpful in this process.

Then direct yourself intentionally to think about other things.

Further, it's important you not judge yourself for the thoughts that go through your mind. We cannot control what thoughts come into our minds; we can take responsibility for not letting them stay and camp out.

Feelings are like waves coming ashore, some of them little waves, gently lapping our coastline. Other times we're experiencing a storm and the waves of our feelings come thundering in loud, crashing and full of threat.

Feelings are based on underlying emotions. The emotions are really what we need to identify; feelings are the sensations in us that the emotions are causing.

The thing about feelings—like waves—they always dissipate. They always reach their limit and then draw away, like waves going back out to sea.

But they are feelings (sensations that we register) and if they are intense, they create a sense of demand. We can think we have to do something because of this feeling, or we'll be overwhelmed.

We won't. It just *feels* that way.

Here's where self-awareness, pausing to focus on deep breathing and talking with a trusted confidante can be strategically helpful.

Awareness is intentionally turning our attention to what is in front of us. When we make ourselves do this, when we remind ourselves 'I only get this moment now; this moment will never come round again' sometimes our eyes are opened to see beauty we take for granted, our minds are opened for new insights and our hearts are truly touched by the Divine.

This is what awareness of the present moment offers us. These possibilities.

Without awareness, the cost of obsession, self-indulgence and lust is dullness, repetition and loss.

ACCEPTANCE

You cannot control all the thoughts that come into your head. You cannot control all the feelings your emotions send through you.

You can monitor, exert control and most importantly, accept. My sponsor always reminds me that acceptance is the only way out of hell. He repeatedly reminds me (redundancy there is intentional) because I need reminding!

Acceptance does not mean we ignore discernment. Living with increasing mindfulness means learning how to recognize what works for us and what doesn't. We are cultivating a wise mind. So we pay attention to what is helpful and what is hurtful.

When we find we are judging ourselves or others, we simply let go and return to acceptance. It's a cultivated discipline.

When we catch ourselves judging, either ourselves or others, sometimes it's helpful to ask what our motivation is. Do our best to identify it and then let it go.

If we're in a hurtful situation or engaging in hurtful behavior, as soon as we recognize it, we do our very best to withdraw to a safer, healthier place.

We work on changing the situations which are causing harm to us or others, and we work on changing our own reactions to those situations, which are sometimes just as harmful. And we do it as steadily, patiently and kindly as we possibly can.

Don't ever get upset with yourself when you're distracted. Be kind with yourself.

Don't chide yourself for having a wandering mind. It helps to try and only do one thing at a time. But when you wander, gently bring yourself back.

This is an intensely spiritual practice. It requires we develop a tolerant attitude. We all need help, from each other and from God.

STRENGTHEN YOUR INNER OBSERVER

All of us have an inner observer in our brains (or is it actually in our souls?) which is linked to but a bit different from all the other parts of our thinking apparatus.

Our inner observer is much like our best self, or true self, in that it is the adult in our midst, the one who is wisest and knows best. Strengthening our inner observer comes, I think, mostly through developing meditation habits, so we'll talk about that in the next Practice.

Your inner observer is like a control center, the place from which all the incoming and outgoing thoughts, emotions, action, memories and experiences are coordinated. That is if they are coordinated. In so many of our lives we live in a reactive mode.

Cultivating our inner observer is part of learning to live proactively, purposefully and increasingly peacefully.

Remember the line from the Serenity Prayer: "accepting hardship as a pathway to peace." Mindfulness helps us find our way there.

One of the wonderful things that comes to us when we intentionally work at living in the moment,

aware of and accepting our thoughts, feelings, sensations and actions is that the power compulsive sexual behavior has over us dissipates. It loses some of its hold on our minds.

We are developing and strengthening different neural pathways. We are getting our lives back. We are learning to live the life we were born to live, the life we want.

ASSIGNMENT FOR ENGAGING THE TWELFTH PRACTICE— MINDFULNESS

1. Read pp 156-164 in *Ashamed No More*, “We Develop Mindfulness” and “Mindfulness and Dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder”
2. Spend some time on the internet looking up mindfulness websites and resources. Pace yourself, it can be overwhelming. Take a look at several sources that look interesting to you.
3. Spend some time every day setting your mind to monitor your thoughts, emotions, actions, memories and actions.
4. Find a set of mindfulness exercises that appeal to you and begin experimenting with them.
5. Develop a goal of finding a pattern of mindfulness exercises and awareness building that works for you.
6. Share with a friend or sponsor what your plan is for developing mindfulness.

TWO BIBLE TEXTS FOR MINDFULNESS

“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts....”

Psalm 95:6-7

“Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’”

Hebrews 3:13-15

PRAYER

God of the Heavens, all time belongs to you and all our days are of your making. Give us a heart of wisdom and a spirit of endurance to live thoughtfully and kindly day by day. Help us to know our minds and to surrender our ways to you, that you may work out in us all that is your deep desire for us. Amen

IN THE NEXT PRACTICE,

we will look at meditation.
