

# Mindfulness

Mindfulness crashed on to the scene some time ago as the new stress-buster, a way to overcome the anxious feelings that may sweep over us at times. I don't know if our lives are any more stressful now than they've ever been. We certainly now live in a culture where everything, or so it appears, must be done instantly, immediately, not a moment to lose! That IS stressful.

Books on mindfulness advocate different exercises, often trying to get us to focus on just one simple thing. One of the more interesting and entertaining exercises involves chocolate, as outlined below:

**Take a square of chocolate.**

**Look carefully at it.**

**Turn it over and examine the other side.**

**Smell it.**

**Pop it on your tongue and suck it (DON'T bite it!)**

**Feel the sensation of melting chocolate on your tongue and around your mouth.**

**GORGEOUS!!!**

This exercise is rather fun – but the main idea of doing it is to get a person to focus on just one thing for a relatively short time.

One constant about our lives is our breathing. We breathe in and out all day long without noticing it or giving it much thought. And so, we are advised to take a few minutes to think about nothing but our breathing, in order to calm ourselves down. If we are stressed, we may be taking shallow, quick breaths which affect our energy levels, and cause our hearts to beat faster. If we take a moment to slow our breathing down by consciously thinking about it then our hearts will, in turn, beat slower, and we will become less agitated.

## Focus on the Right Thing

Now all this is very well and good and may be quite useful. But how will this help with our spiritual health, getting to know God and His Son, the Lord Jesus, any better?

Well there is nothing new under the sun, and there is certainly nothing new about the concepts around mindfulness.

Job is told to, *“Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God” (Job 37:14).*

God is talking to Job about His creation, how everything in nature is just right, whether it's the weather system, the heavens, the earth's surface, plant life, the animal kingdom, or humankind.

Stop what you're doing, Job. Stop worrying about what is happening to you and

around you, because God created it and is in control of it all. And when you consider this, you will know there is nothing to worry about. Focus on that one thing.

Easy to say – much harder to do. We can find more examples like this in the Bible.

## Jacob Gains Peace of Mind

In the book of Genesis, we have the account of two brothers, Jacob and Esau, who fell out. Jacob was rightly afraid that Esau would kill him, and he ran away from his family to live many miles away with his uncle. All the time he was travelling he must have been looking over his shoulder to see if his older, stronger brother was coming after him.

His journey would not have been a leisurely affair: it would have been frantic, full of anxiety and fear. However, no matter how worried he was, he had to stop and sleep. So, using a stone for a pillow, he settled down to try and rest for a few hours. No doubt his night's sleep would not be terribly restful, being so worried.

He had a very strange dream in which he saw a ladder stretching up to heaven. Climbing up and down it were angels, and at the top was the Lord God. He told Jacob that He was the God of his father and grandfather, and would be his God too. He would bless him and his descendants.

When Jacob woke up he realised that he was not alone but that God was with him. He also realised that God's promise to bless him included his descendants

too, which meant he must be going to live long enough in order to marry and have children. He had no doubt planned to leave as soon as he awoke, to put more miles between him and his angry brother.

Instead he stopped, considered what he had dreamed and its meaning, and then took the time to use his stone pillow as an altar on which he poured oil in honour of the Lord God and His promise. He still travelled on to his uncle's, but in a much better frame of mind.

## Moses Stands Still

Moses had been commissioned by God to lead the Israelites out of the land of Egypt where they had been slaves for many years. After several incidents, the Pharaoh of Egypt had reluctantly let them leave but shortly afterwards changed his mind and sent his army after them.

Moses and the people had arrived between what we would call now 'a rock and a hard place'. In front of them was the wide spread of the Red Sea and behind them was the army of Egypt which was gaining ground all the time. What were they to do? Drown or be captured and returned to work as slaves in Egypt, some of them being slaughtered in the process?

But Moses had complete faith in the Lord God who had told him that he would successfully lead the people into their own promised land.

*Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD,*

which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever” (Exodus 14:13).

I’m sure you’ve seen pictures or even the film which showed how the waters of the Red Sea parted and the people walked safely through, as promised.



So here is another example of spiritual mindfulness, just standing firm, taking stock, and believing that God will help when we ask in faith.

## Jesus Prays

At the worst time of his life, when he knew he had only hours to live, Jesus went apart from his disciples in order to ... what? Plan his escape? Plan a counter-attack? Give in to the demands of the religious leaders and stop preaching? No, none of those things.

Jesus had eaten the meal we now call ‘The Last Supper’ with his disciples and gone into a garden. In Matthew 26:37 we see

that he is described as being ‘sorrowful and deeply distressed’. In this frame of mind, he prayed to his Heavenly Father.

He did what all of us might have done – asked that he be saved from the dreadful things that were going to happen to him. But he also said that whatever God needed him to do, he would do it. Jesus went to a quiet place; he was alone (the disciples had fallen asleep, so unaware were they of the events that were about to occur); he thought; he considered; and he prayed.

## Spiritual Mindfulness

We all, sometimes, feel overwhelmed by life, the things that happen to us, the things that are happening around us. We may feel helpless and can become anxious.

When this happens, taking a few quiet minutes away from everyone else, and thinking about your breathing so that you can slow your heart rate down and become calmer, may help.

More powerfully, we can adopt the Bible’s advice and examples. Consider God’s power and His care for men and women. Be ready to see God at work, doing what you can but accepting that His power is so far above ours. Pray for a way to deal with whatever is worrying you, accepting that God’s will is supreme.

Perhaps, if you can’t find your own words, use the Lord’s prayer. God will hear you and help you if you let Him.

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