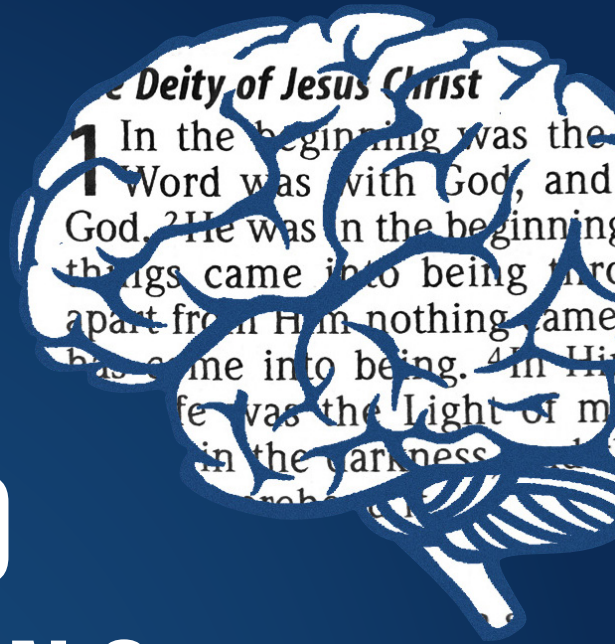


SHOULD CHRISTIANS PRACTICE MINDFULNESS?

CHARLES STONE



ABOUT ME



I've been in ministry over 38 years as a church planter, a lead pastor, an associate pastor, a pastoral coach, and a church consultant. I've served on staff at churches in the U.S. in the South, the Southwest, the Midwest, and the far West. I currently serve as the lead pastor at West Park Church, a multi-cultural church in London, Ontario where we offer four services in four languages (English, Mandarin, Spanish, and Arabic) in four spaces in the same building, all at the same time on Sundays.

I earned an engineering degree from GA Tech, an MDiv from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a DMin from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and an Executive Masters in Neuroleadership from the Neuroleadership Institute. I'm currently earning the Graduate Certificate in Mind, Brain, and Teaching at Johns Hopkins University and the Therapeutic Models of Mindfulness Certificate at Wilfred Laurier in Ontario.

I've been married to the most wonderful woman in the world for 38 years, Sherryl, and we have three grown children. Our oldest, Heather, is a nurse. Our middle child, Joshua, is a pastor and is married to Deborah. They have two children, Judah and Rebecca, with one on the way. And our youngest, Tiffany, is studying at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto to be a chaplain and a counselor.

I'm passionate about helping people apply brain insight to life, leadership, and spiritual formation.

I have authored four books with a fifth *Holy Noticing: The Bible, Your Brain, and the Space between Moments* to be released by Moody Publishers in March, 2019. I blog at my website, www.Charlesstone.com and you can follow me on Twitter [@charlesstone](https://twitter.com/charlesstone).

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WHAT IS MINDFULNESS AND SHOULD CHRISTIANS PRACTICE IT?

Mindfulness is a big deal in today's culture. Businesses such as Apple, sports figures such as basketball player Kobe Bryant, and the popular press such as *Time* magazine have all given it their stamp of approval. Governments are spending hundreds of millions of dollars researching it,¹ and it has become a billion dollar a year business.² In fact, Apple chose a mindfulness app as their app of the year for 2017.³

But should Christians embrace it just because everyone else is doing it? No. Much about mindfulness in popular culture has nothing to

do with God, Jesus, the Bible, or Christianity. And “Christianizing” the latest fad dilutes the faith and can lead us astray.

However, does God's Word support and does Christian history illustrate Christians using some of these techniques as tools for spiritual growth?⁴ Yes. It's a lost spiritual discipline that believers should reclaim. And well-known Christians are embracing practices like mindfulness.

In a TV interview a few years before his death, Billy Graham was asked what he would do over if he could do things differently. In his inimitable way, he said, “I'd spend more time in meditation and prayer.”⁵

But just what is mindfulness?

I call it *Holy Noticing*, being fully present and mindful in each moment God has given us. I've defined *mindfulness* as ***the art of Holy Noticing, noticing with a holy purpose, God and His handiwork, our relationships, and our inner world of thoughts and feelings.***

In this brief e-book I give the Biblical basis for mindfulness, a bit of Christian history about it, a summary of the key benefits from it, a list of positive attitudes it affects, a guideline on how to practice it, and a next step you can take to learn more about it.



THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR MINDFULNESS

One of the greatest examples of a mindful, holy noticing lifestyle comes from the life of Jesus Himself. He modeled for us how to fully live in the present moment.

- + Although thirsty Himself, He quenched the thirsty heart of a woman at a well (John 4).
- + Although pressed by crowds, He knew that a sick woman had in desperation touched His robe for healing (Mark 5).
- + Although His disciples tried to inhibit Him, He welcomed little children into His arms (Mark 10).
- + Although demands mounted, He spent leisure time with Mary and Martha (Luke 10).
- + Although tempted by Satan in the desert, thoughts, and feelings about power and wealth didn't preoccupy His mind (Matt. 4).
- + Although a hectic schedule loomed, He stopped to pay attention to cries from lepers (Luke 17).



- + And although He had only three years of public ministry, He often withdrew from the crowds to spend time alone with Him (Mark 1; Luke 5).

One standout episode in Jesus' life illustrates this in action, alluded to in the list above. It happened during His visit with Mary and Martha when He contrasted their responses to His presence with them. He drew attention to Mary's present-moment engagement with Himself and lovingly admonished Martha for her busyness.

And in another episode Jesus captured the essence of this practice in his rebuke of Peter in Mark 8:33. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." As we hone our ability to be present in the moment of moral choosing, we will more consistently choose the "things of God" rather than "the things of men" that vie for our attention. As it becomes an ongoing trait in our lives—as a skill we can learn—it will profoundly benefit our lives, our relationship with God, and those around us.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR MINDFULNESS

Christian history from the past two thousand years provides many examples of believers who developed and practiced this lifestyle of mindfulness or holy noticing. One expert writes, “Mindfulness was not just a practice of Jesus recovered today but has been a practice of the Church through the centuries, though often neglected and repressed.”⁶

Although the term “contemplation” was sometimes the word of choice for this type of Christian spirituality⁷ it was defined as “the action of beholding, or looking at with attention and thought,”⁸ significant components in the art of holy noticing.

Although hundreds of committed Christians from early Christian history practiced and wrote on a lifestyle of holy noticing, a few stand out.



+ **Origen of Alexander**
(AD 185–250)

Origen of Alexander was the third-century early church scholar who wrote that the most important factor in understanding the spiritual life was attention,⁹ a key aspect of holy noticing.

+ **St. Augustine of Hippo**
(AD 354–430)

Scattered throughout the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo are insights that emphasize our need to be aware of our thoughts.

+ **John Calvin**
(1509–1564)

John Calvin, one of the most influential theologians in Christian history, began his famous theological treatise, *Institutes*, by writing about self-awareness (knowledge of self), an essential component of holy noticing.¹⁰ For Calvin, faith included both theological correctness and a strong emotional heart connection.¹¹

+ **Martin Luther**
(1483–1546)

Martin Luther began the Protestant Revolution and was greatly influenced by several of the earlier writers who wrote

about what we're calling holy noticing.¹² He even said that one book (*German Theology*) influenced him so much that with the exception of the Bible and Augustine's work, he learned more from that book than any other.¹³

+ **John Wesley**
(1703–1791)

John Wesley founded Methodism and promoted what he called "watchfulness," a spiritual posture to help believers be alert to God in all things. He practiced and taught a way of life to prayerfully attend to the working of God in every moment.

+ **D.L. Moody**
(1837–1899)

D. L. Moody owned and cited several books written by ancient and modern Christian contemplatives (those who practiced mindfulness) such as Madame Guyon and Thomas à Kempis.¹⁴

+ **A.W. Tozer**
(1897–1963)

And pastor and devotional writer A. W. Tozer quotes and alludes to thirty-five contemplative writers in a positive way.¹⁵

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

I've been a committed Christian for almost five decades. I've served Jesus vocationally as a pastor almost four decades. I've read, studied, and memorized the Bible. I've practiced spiritual disciplines. Yet, something was amiss. My neatly packed theology—love God, do the right spiritual things, and peace will result—wasn't working.

It was like Neo in *The Matrix* when he said, "Something was just not right, something was missing, something was lacking, something bothering me like a *splinter in your mind*." I wondered, *Did I have a splinter in my mind?*

At times I could not stop the incessant mental chatter about such issues as an ongoing conflict with a church leader, uncertainty about our church's financial future, or discouragement that my church was not growing. As I lay in bed at night, unable to sleep, I prayed. I quoted Scripture.



I commanded Satan to leave me alone. I took melatonin. I ate Cheetos. But whatever I did to quiet my mind failed. When I tried to force my mind to *not* think about these issues, my mind became like a megaphone, amplifying those thoughts and emotions.

Has that ever happened to you at night? You try not to worry. You tell yourself to stop being anxious. You try every spiritual trick you know and nothing seems to work. Finally you drift off to sleep, at 1:00 a.m. And at 4:00 a.m. you wake up and immediately the same nagging issues bombard your mind. In my journey learning about holy noticing I realized I was not alone in my struggles as one author delightfully captured in a poem. In it he says if you can be calm in difficulty, not envy others, fall asleep easily, and be content no matter what, you're probably a dog.¹⁶

My personal struggle led me to discover mindfulness and it has revolutionized my life.

5 PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS



1. It helps you avoid spiritual forgetfulness.

Holy noticing can help us counter our tendency to spiritually forget God. It helps interrupt our thought stream that often gets hooked on unhealthy regrets and ruminations about the past, misrepresentations about the present, and worries about the future. It helps us spiritually remember by calming our brain's fear centers while simultaneously engaging our thinking centers so that we can think more clearly and biblically. It helps us *come to our senses* like the younger son in the prodigal son story came to his (Luke 15:11–32). And the Psalms often illustrate that thoughtful reflective practices serve as an antidote to spiritual forgetting (see Psalms 78, 103, 106, 137).

2. It can enhance your mental and emotional health.

- + It helps keep negative emotions from running unchecked.¹⁷
- + It helps us avoid wrong assumptions and incorrect thought patterns.¹⁸
- + It gives us greater awareness of our internal body sensations,¹⁹ which can cue unhealthy, unconscious thinking patterns.
- + It helps us “think about our thinking,” which make us consciously aware of unhealthy and sinful thinking.²⁰ We might call this mental reflection the apostle Paul wrote about in Philippians 4:8.
- + It helps us identify less with difficult emotions.²¹ We don’t let them define our true self.

As a result, this way of life helps us more consistently act upon truth since we have the *mind of Christ* (2 Cor. 10:5). We become less defensive and less likely to react as we exercise the the fruit of the Spirit (Eph. 4:22–23). We think more

biblically as we put into our working memory (also called short-term memory) more truth (Phil. 4:8). We become more present in the moment for God and others. And we ruminate less often over negative thoughts.

3. It can increase your happiness by changing your interior landscape.

Changing our interior landscape, our thoughts and emotions, can shift our levels of happiness. A mindful lifestyle enhances the brain's ability to rewire itself through experience, thoughts, and behavior. It's called neuroplasticity. That is, the brain is more like pliable putty than rigid porcelain. What we think about and do changes our brain. When mindfulness effects neuroplasticity it's like an electrician running new wiring to bring a house up to code. Even the aging adult brain can change and be "brought up to code."

4. You will be able to live more as a human being rather than a human doing.

Earlier in this e-book I mentioned the story of Mary and Martha. It bears repeating as it best illustrates the difference between a *doing mode* and a *being mode*. Martha illustrates our culture's entrapment with performance, what we might call a human *doing*. Mary illustrates God's desire for us to be present in the moment as a human *being*. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus while Martha was in the kitchen fretting about preparing a meal for Jesus and fuming about Mary's lack of support. I'm not implying that we should become passive and lazy people caught up in our inner world with no drive to achieve. We all need some of Martha's qualities. She was goal-oriented, persistent, and followed through

on her plans. She simply failed to switch gears. A lifestyle of holy noticing helps us switch gears from a problem-solving *doing mode* to a presence *being mode* when we need to switch. And of course, as we submit to the Holy Spirit, He is always at work, no matter which mode we may be in.

5. You will develop a lifestyle of holy noticing and experiences its benefits every day

Researchers have categorized mindfulness as either a *trait* (a lifestyle, habit, or disposition stable over time)²² or a *state* (temporary and may be induced by our current situation). As you grow in your ability to make holy noticing more of a trait in your life, you will more often bring an awareness of God's presence to your mind, heart, and activities, a posture Paul describes as "pray[ing] without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17 ESV).



7 KEY ATTITUDES MINDFULNESS CULTIVATES

Several biblical attitudes form the basis of holy noticing.²³

1. Avoiding the temptation to judge every thought and emotion (and other people as well) and avoiding trying to immediately change them, unless you immediately sense they are sinful (see Matt. 7:1–5).
2. Cultivating patience by avoiding the driven-ness to move to a better moment...not letting the clock rule your heart (see Prov. 14:29).
3. Fostering a beginner's mindset by approaching your emotions and thoughts with child-like faith, curiosity, and wonder (see Matt. 18:2–4).
4. Trusting in God's goodness, timing, and providence since you don't know everything (see John 14:1).
5. Embracing a non-striving, restful posture to enjoy the journey of life, being less driven, and living in and appreciating the current moment better. This does not mean being lazy or passive. (see Ps 46:10).
6. Nurturing acceptance as you learn to submit to your experiences, trusting that God is at work in them (see Ex. 14:14). This does not mean enduring abuse, sin, or injustice with passive resignation.
7. Letting go of what you think you need or must have, realizing that you aren't at the mercy of your passions and desires. This doesn't mean detachment from reality or nihilism (see Prov. 16, 32, 25, 28).



HOW TO PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

Holy noticing is a way to bring intentional awareness in the present moment to what and who is around us and what we're doing, thinking, and feeling—all from God's perspective.

A practical way to learn and practice this mindful lifestyle is with the easy-to-remember and recall acronym BREATHe. Each component of this model begins with one letter of this word. The last letter ("e") is actually the most important aspect of holy noticing. It ties everything together.



Holy noticing—noticing with a holy, God-focused purpose—means noticing your

- + **B**ody: Pay attention to your physical body states and sensations;
- + **R**elationships: Assess the health of your relationships;
- + **E**nvironment: Become aware of your current surroundings, including sights, sounds, smells, and God's creation;
- + **A**fflictive emotions or **A**ffect (a general term for emotions): Acknowledge how you're currently feeling;
- + **T**houghts: Become aware of your current thoughts;
- + **H**earth: Pay attention to the state of your spiritual life and the Holy Spirit's whisperings or impressions on your heart; and, to tie it all together,
- + **e**ngage: Engage the world like Christ, practicing holy noticing in the mundane, the everyday, the ordinary.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

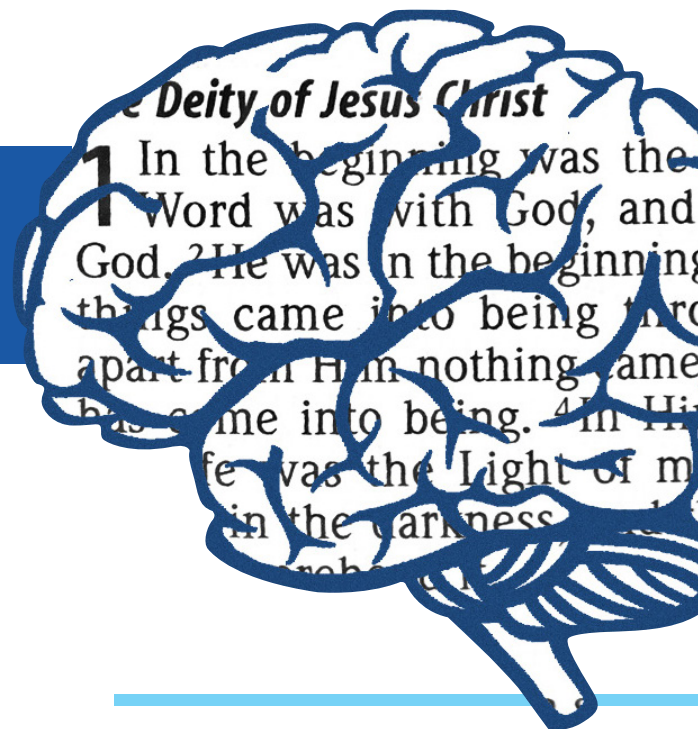
So, in this brief e-book, I've done these things:

1. Defined mindfulness as Holy Noticing.
2. Given Biblical and historical support for Christians to practice it.
3. Shared a bit of my personal journey about how I discovered of mindfulness.
4. Given 5 benefits and 7 attitudes that mindfulness brings.
5. Summarized a practical way to practice it with the BREATHe model.

So, what would be a next step?

Considering pre-ordering my newest book called *Holy Noticing: The Bible, Your Brain, and the Space Between Moments* from any of these on-line retailers.

Amazon
Moody Press
Christianbook.com
Barnes and Noble



Author, leadership coach, and Founder of The 4Sight Group Jenni Catron wrote, *A few years ago a leader challenged me with the idea that great leaders are a 'non-anxious presence'. That idea awakened me to how anxious, hurried and unaware I was. Charles Stones new book, "Holy Noticing" provides a pathway for understanding the concept of mindfulness from a biblical perspective and equips you to thrive in an exhausting world. An amazing resource!*

It has been endorsed by several well-known Christian leaders including author and pastor John Ortberg who wrote, *Ancient wisdom and current research converge in a most helpful guide. You can't afford to lose your mind!*

¹ Elizabeth Harrington, "NIH Has Spent \$100.2 Million on Mindfulness Meditation," Washington Free Beacon, December 16, 2014, <http://freebeacon.com/issues/nih-has-spent-92-9-million-on-mindfulness-meditation/>.

² "Meditation Has Become Big Business," Fortune, accessed November 3, 2017, <http://fortune.com/2016/03/12/meditation-mindfulness-apps/>.

³ Kif Leswing, "Apple just named its favorite apps and games of the year," December 7, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/apple-iphone-ipad-app-of-the-year-for-2017-12>

⁴ Shaun Lambert, *Putting on on the Wakeful One: Attuning to the Spirit of Jesus through Watchfulness* (city: Instant Apostle, 2016), loc. 771–772, Kindle.

⁵ Albrecht Wattimury, Billy Graham - *I'd Spend More Time in Meditation & Prayer*, accessed July 20, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dluWwQAOTo>.

⁶ Stefan Gillow Reynolds, *Living With The Mind of Christ: Mindfulness and Christian Spirituality* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2016), loc. 108, Kindle.

⁷ Tom Schwanda and J. I. Packer, *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism* (Pickwick Publications, 2015), 17.

⁸ Ibid., 75..

⁹ Nataraja, Kim. *Journey to the Heart: Christian Contemplation through the Centuries - An Illustrated Guide*. Illustrated Guide edition. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2012, loc. 887, Kindle.

¹⁰ Aaron, "John Calvin: Knowledge of God, Knowledge of Self," October 15, 2009, <http://apologeticjunkie.blogspot.com/2009/10/john-calvin-knowledge-of-god-knowledge.html>.

¹¹ Schwanda and Packer, 41.

¹² Collicutt, Joanna, and Roger Bretherton. *Being Mindful, Being Christian: A Guide to Mindful Discipleship*. Monarch Books, 2016. p. 63.

¹³ Ursula King, *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies Throughout the Ages* (city: HiddenSpring, 2001), loc. 1119, Kindle.

¹⁴ "How D. L. Moody Paved the Way for Today's Evangelicals," *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), accessed December 8, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/how-d-l-moody-paved-the-way-for-todays-evangelicals/>.

¹⁵ E. Lynn Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A.W. Tozer, a Twentieth-Century American Protestant* (San Francisco: Edwin Mellen Pr, 1992).

¹⁶ Jack Kornfield and Jon Kabat-Zinn, *A Lamp in the Darkness: Illuminating the Path Through Difficult Times*, Reprint edition (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2014), 7. t

¹⁷ This is called affective bias.

¹⁸ This is called knowing wrongly. Brown, Creswell, and Ryan, *Handbook of Mindfulness*, 42.

¹⁹ This is called interoception. "The Strange Case of Interoception and Resilience," *Body in Mind* (blog), May 17, 2016, <http://www.bodyinmind.org/interoception-resilience/>.

²⁰ This is called metacognition. Dilwar Hussain, "Meta-Cognition in Mindfulness: A Conceptual Analysis," *Psychological Thought* 8, no. 2 (October 16, 2015): 132–41.

²¹ This is called de-centering.

²² J David Creswell et al., "Neural Correlates of Dispositional Mindfulness During Affect Labeling," *Psychosomatic Medicine* 69, no. 6 (July 2007): 560–65, <https://doi.org/10.1097/PSY.0b013e3180f6171f>.

²³ Jon Kabat-Zinn Ph.D, *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment—and Your Life*, Pap/Com edition (Sounds True, 2016), loc. 353–1517, Kindle.

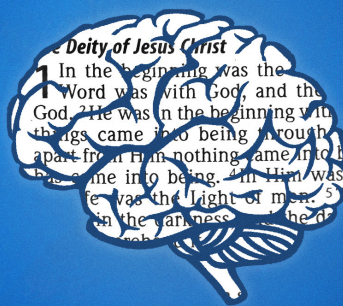


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