Moses Project Spiritual Practices Spring 2022

**Practicing Presence**

Have you ever had the experience of driving someplace and realizing along the way that you don’t really remember anything about the drive? (That light was green, right?!) Or of having a conversation with someone only to find that you got distracted thinking about something else and have lost the thread of what the other person is sharing? It’s not too uncommon for our bodies and our minds to end up in different places! When our minds get caught up in the past or the future, we miss what’s here now. And this *present* moment is the only one we can actually work with. It is in the present that we can be available to God, to one another and to ourselves, which is why this spiritual practice is so important.

Presence calls us to bring our whole self into the present—body, mind and spirit. A big part of this is simply paying attention to what’s here now. This might invite attentiveness to what is outside of us, such as the words of another person or the beauty of our surroundings, and to what is inside of us, including our attitudes and intentions and our thoughts, feelings and body sensations. Here are some ways you might experiment with developing your practice of presence:

* Pause before transitions (getting out of the car, going into a meeting, answering the phone…), take a breath, and set an intention to be present in your next activity.
* Use mundane, everyday tasks as opportunities to practice being present. Choose one task each day and notice your sensations: what you feel, see and hear. Focus on one aspect of the chore at a time. Notice your breathing.
* When someone is speaking to you, stop what you’re doing and listen.
* Listen to music without doing anything else. Allow yourself to be fully engaged with the music.
* Take a different route home. Notice how you feel doing something new.

In a Group: Give the group 10 or 15 minutes to take a walk (inside or outside). Before they begin, encourage them to notice something that catches their eye and to pause to be present with it, noting what drew their attention and how it feels to stay with it for a moment. Each person should feel free to wander on their own. At the end of the time, call the group together and invite them to share about their experience. How is this experience similar to or different from how they generally move through their day?

Sabbath-Keeping

In her book, *Leaving Church*, Barbara Brown Taylor provides some insight into what sabbath is all about: “Stop for one whole day every week, and you will remember what it means to be created in the image of God, who rested on the seventh day not from weariness but from complete freedom. The clear promise is that those who rest like God find themselves free like God, no longer slaves to the thousand compulsions that send others rushing toward their graves.” It’s not hard to find ourselves enslaved by our busyness. Life might feel like little more than going through the motions of tending to an endless to-do list. In the hustle and bustle, we lose perspective on what matters most. Sometimes we even lose sight of who we really are as we begin to define ourselves by what we do.

This may be the reason that remembering the Sabbath is a commandment rather than a suggestion! We need the Sabbath to remind us that life is more than what we do or do not accomplish. It is about who are, about what we are becoming through God’s grace at work within us. Whether or not we practice on THE Sabbath, we are called to find ways to step away from the busyness to simply be in God’s presence, to enjoy the blessings God provides, and to find rest, renewal and the perspective we need to live in the freedom and love God gives us. This might look like prayer and Bible study, service to others, meaningful time with friends or family, rest or play… whatever calls back into connection with who we are as God’s beloved children.

In a Group: Give group members a piece of paper and have them to divide it into two columns. In one, instruct them to list what they do (at least in part). In the other, ask them list characteristics or qualities of who they are. Invite some reflection and discussion about how each of these lists shape who they are. Then invite some consideration of what helps them to connect with who they are, particularly as children of God. Encourage them to identify one way they might set aside time for that kind of connection in the coming week.

Andrea Severson, L.M.H.C., M.Div.

Andrea Severson is a licensed mental health counselor and spiritual director. Her degrees include a Master of Science in counseling from Drake University and a Master of Divinity from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. She holds a certificate in spiritual direction and is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. Andrea enjoys hearing the unique stories of the individuals and couples with whom she works.  Her areas of interest include anxiety, depression, trauma, identity, faith and spirituality, life transitions, and relationships.  Andrea is a member of the American Mental Health Counselors Association and Spiritual Directors International. In her spare time, she likes reading historical fiction, listening to the Beatles and camping.