

## BEING PRESENT

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So, I'm speaking this morning about being present because life is busy. Life is busy and there's a lot going on in the world. So, it's easy to not be present these days. Are you finding that? That we're kind of all over the place. So being present. It's a busy time.

It's a busy time in our own lives. We have our younger son. It's his senior year in college. In this last semester, there's a lot of activity. We're going back and forth to California; a lot of time with that. We still haven't unpacked our house of 13 months. We both work 40-hour jobs, and so we've got about six loads of laundry that need to be folded; if I have any volunteers for that, that would be great |

And so, when you have a long "to-do" list, it's easy to not be present. And with the outside world and the anxieties and the news and all that that's happening, that also takes us out of the present moment. All the noise, all the divisiveness, taking us out of being present.

So yesterday, I was preparing for a celebration of life service here, and I got the call that Rev. Beci is out with the flu; she was supposed to speak this morning. And later yesterday I also had a wedding to attend. So, my first thought was, "Okay I'm being called in to speak; take a breath and be present." So, I knew I have a catalog now of talks at least 10 years ... probably more! But on this laptop, I have at least 10 years of talks. So I opened it up, and what should I see that popped out at me, but a talk I gave in 2019 called "Being Present." And I thought, "There it is: Being present."

And whenever I know that I need to hear something, usually what I've found that many of you come up and say, I needed to hear that too. Being present. So, I want to look at today: When are we not present? How can we be more present? And what tools do we have to be more present? And why is it so important that we stay present?

So, just to start, so we're all on the same page. Being present. Here's how being present is defined. It's defined as having your focus, your attention, your thoughts, and feelings all fixed on the task at hand.

Charles Fillmore, our co-founder, wrote in "The Revealing Word": "*Being present is the awareness of spiritual truth.*" So being aware then, being present to our divine nature. When we're present, then that means that we're aware of being present to our divine nature.

Here's what Eric Butterworth, one of our famous Unity authors/ministers, wrote in "Practical Metaphysics." He wrote this: "*To practice the presence is to live constantly as if you believe that the Allness of God were present in all its totality at every point and space. This means it's present in you in every experience of your life and every function of your body.*" That's the practice of presence.

The practice of presence: knowing that the Allness of God Is within you and in your life in every moment. But see, we can't remember our divine nature if we're too busy thinking about the past or the future. If we're here and there, we're not here and we're not remembering our divine I AM.

So, when are we not present? Well, I just mentioned it, because life gets busy; life gets busy. And yet, we hate to be so busy that life passes us by and we miss it. One of the top regrets of the dying is, "*I wish I hadn't worked so hard*" or "*I wish I'd spent more time with my children, my family, my partner, my friends.*"

Eckhart Tolle wrote in "The Power of Now": "*Most people treat the present moment as if it were an obstacle that they need to overcome. But since the present moment is life itself, it's an insane way to*

*live.* Every moment is life itself. Being present even in the busyness of life, because that is life. How often do we try to just get through the task -- get through the day -- instead of being present to it?

Noticing? And then there's also the "monkey mind," Right? Our chatter. So often we have the chatter that's taking us out of the present moment. It's chattering about the future, what we need to do, what's going to happen. Or it's chattering about the past. It's ruminating; It's wishing I was still there or things were still this way. So, our own mind chatter gets in the way of being present.

And then there's the chatter even when we're with somebody. We're usually hearing them, but we're not listening to them. We're thinking about ourselves or about how we're going to respond to that conversation. So, we may be at lunch with a friend, but are we truly attentively listening or are we thinking about our response?

Here's what Brené Brown, the sociologist researcher, said: *"Being present to another person reminds us we are not alone in our humanness."* When we're really present with another person, we're reminded that we're not alone in our humanness, which then reminds us that we can step into extending our divine nature: our true selves.

We had one of our nephews stay with us a few years ago when we were in California. He'd spent some time in Japan. He was a wonderful guest, because I'd wake up every morning and the kitchen was clean and neat, and he'd be sitting there. And I'd say, *"Can I make you some breakfast or some tea?"*

And he said, *"Oh, I've already had it, and I cleaned it up already."* I called him my kitchen fairy.

But we had these lovely moments in the morning, where we just sit and connect and talk; be present with one another. And he taught me a word that he learned in Japan. He said, *"Stacy, this would be called in Japan"* -- again, I'm going to do my best here -- the saying is, *ichi-go ichi-e*. It means a once-in-a-lifetime encounter. It means we will never have this moment again. We'll never have this moment again. So being present with the people that you're with -- in the moment that you're in -- as if it's sacred time, because it is. You will never have that moment again.

And then there's outside noise. The outside noise is getting in the way of being present. We give so much of our time away to hearing other people's opinions, their anger, their noise ... whether it's the news or social media or gossiping. All of that is either past or future. It's not the right now.

Eckhart Tolle writes, *"If you're not living in this moment, you're not really living."*

If you're not living in this moment, you're not really living. So, I'm not saying don't be informed, but I'm saying: limit the outside noise, because it's pulling us in different directions and it's harming our mental health; our spiritual health, as well. And so, instead, returning again and again to this moment; this moment that will never be this moment again. Let me really sit in the sacredness of this moment.

So, it's important that we identify when we're not present so we can catch it, so we become more aware. So, when we start to hear chattering in the future or chattering about the past, we can bring ourselves -- just notice, we don't beat ourselves up about it. We just notice, *"Okay,"* and we gently bring ourselves back to the present moment. And we have tools. We have tools.

So, the first one is **the time tool**, because time is a human concept. Mother Nature doesn't have a clock. Mother Nature just evolves in the moment. And so, here's an interesting piece from "Psychology Today." They wrote, *"Time is an illusion, which makes being controlled by time somewhat delusional. The past doesn't exist, and neither does the future. The only true reference point we have to this moment in time is a feeling of presence: of being here in this body; of seeing the world through these eyes. This is all that can exist, because this is what you feel right now. You can't feel the past or the future, but you can feel*

*what it feels like to touch something right now, to see something right now, or hear something right now."*

Touching something right now. Hearing something right now. So, you hear my voice right now. You can touch your chair or your clothing right now, maybe your fingertips right now. All of those things bring you back to ground you in this now moment; this present moment.

And catching our thoughts, also. Because sometimes we're having so much fun, we don't want it to end. And then we hear ourselves saying, *"I'm having so much fun, I don't want this to end."* Our older son used to do that. We'd be on vacation and he'd say, *"Oh, I don't want vacation to end!"* But then he was missing vacation. We're thinking so much about what we're going to miss that we miss that present moment.

And I also share -- always share -- with new parents. I say, *"You know, it's true what they say. Your children grow up fast. It all goes really fast. So, remember when you're in the challenging times, remind yourself: it goes fast."* And also, those beautiful, joyous times; that also goes fast. Be present."

Even now as an empty nester, when I'm with my adult children who live in different states -- one's in Florida; one's in California -- I breathe into those moments when we're together. I really cherish those moments as sacred moments. When we're together again as a family, wow! I'm present, because I know it's just this moment.

I'm starting to realize that this Christmas looked different than past Christmases, but then future Christmases will look different, also. So just being in this moment, this Christmas, this time together so you don't miss what is right now. Don't get ahead of yourself.

Here's what else Eckhart Tolle writes. He says, *"Most humans are never fully present in the now, because unconsciously they believe that the next moment must be more important than this one. But then you miss your whole life, which is never not now."*

So, asking yourself: What time is it? Now! What time is it? Now. What time is it? Now! It's now. Catching when you're way over here or way over there and bringing yourself to *"The time is right now. The only time I have in this moment."* Catching our thoughts and realizing time is an illusion.

The other tool we have is breath: **breathing**, especially when we do a slow exhale through the nose. It actually relaxes us. It relaxes our body. It relaxes our nervous system so that we can be present.

And I love the count. It's the 4-2-6 count. You can kind of remember it from 2-4-6, but it's 4-2-6. And it just is four breaths in. I mean, I count to four breaths in; and then holding two counts at the top; and then a slow six-count exhale. So, we can even try that together right now. So, we're going to breathe in for four; hold for two; and exhale for six. Yeah!

What that does is: it allows us to ground us to the present by letting everything fall away. That long out breath can just let us let it fall away and be present to now. It connects us to that divine flow of life that we're part of.

Another breath we could do is it's called the box breath, because it's 4-4-4-4, right? The four corners of a box. Four sides of a box: 4-4-4-4. But here's how that breath goes. You breathe in for four; you hold for four; and then you exhale for four. And now you pause for four. And you do that at least three times.

Therapists use this a lot. Psychologists use this a lot, because it's been shown to calm our nervous system. When our nervous system is calm -- when I can be fully in my body and present -- then I'm present. A calm nervous system means I can be more present. So, breath work.

Then we also have, of course, meditation. Of course, the benefits of meditation: it decreases our heart rate; it lowers our blood pressure; it increases all of our good feeling hormones while it decreases our stress hormones. But mostly it teaches us to slow down and take each moment as it comes.

Our meditation practice isn't just about what happens on the mat -- the meditation mat or chair. It's about taking that idea into our daily lives -- into every experience -- so that we can really enjoy the sights and the sounds that are before us, whether it's the sound of traffic or the sound of children laughing. But to be present.

So from one of my favorite books -- it's called "Meditation for Dummies." Love the title! But it says: *"Meditation reminds us that the only present moment exists right here anyway."*

And I know I've heard from a lot of people who have said, *"Stacy, I can't meditate; my mind's too busy."* That's what your mind was built to do. So, it's doing its job. Your mind is busy, because minds were built to think. So, celebrate that! *"My mind is working!"*

The goal with meditation is not to be perfect in meditation; to wipe out all thoughts. It's about following the breath in and following it out and allowing the moment to be whatever it is.

So, if you've ever done yoga before -- and I really love yoga. And I love how yoga instructors always say this, because they'll tell you, *"You know, some days your pose will be strong, and some days your pose will wobble."* And it's the same thing with meditation. Some days you'll be very present to your breath, and sometimes your mind will wander. And that's information. It's not judgment. But it's information that invites curiosity so that I can become more aware of what's going on inside me; what's happening within me. So, outside my meditation practice, I can look at that so that I can become more present.

And when I meditate with my breath, a lot of times what I'll do is -- when those thoughts come in -- I'll just label them. So, I'm with my breath in, my breath out. Now, suddenly I'm thinking, *"Oh, I've got to do this and that."* Future. I just label it, "future." And I come back to my breath. I'm in with my breath, out with my breath. And then suddenly my thoughts: *"How dare she? Na, na, na, na, na."* "Past." I label it "past." And I come back to my breath. It's the in and the out.

And then afterwards is where I can look at. Where were most my thoughts? Were they in the past? Were they in the future? What needs to be addressed in a compassionate way, in a gentle way with myself? And that's where, with meditation -- and another technique can be "the eyes behind the eyes." Who is that observer? Who's the observer in any moment? And be that observer in the moment; to bear witness to every moment, to observe it, to name it. The moment is *this* right now. The moment is this right now.

I know my own experience, beginning of meditation, I would beat myself up over, *"Oh, I thought too much, or I didn't stay still long enough,"* or whatever it was. But what happened is: when I just start to be, *"Let me just look at it -- not judge it, but look at it, be aware of it"* -- it actually brought me into being more loving and compassionate with myself, which translated into being more present.

And a meditation I started in 2019 -- because at 2019, I had written, *"Hey! Brand new meditation I've just started!"* But it's this thought of -- and I brought it into our meditation this morning -- *"Just for today."* Or, *"Just for this moment."* *"Just for this moment, I'll be calm. Just for this moment, I'll be patient. Tomorrow's another moment. If I want to not be calm tomorrow, I can choose that. But for this moment, -- for this moment -- I choose calm. I choose kindness. I choose patience"* ... whatever it is.

But it's that idea of intentional living: of being the presence of God in that moment; to being aware of this moment -- this one unique moment in the life that we have and that we're part of and acting intentionally from that place. Of being so intentional with we're moving in our day and our activities.

And so that brings us to: So why is it important to be present? So, Eckhart Tolle writes this. He says, *"Always say 'yes!' to the present moment. Say 'yes' to life and see how life starts suddenly to work for you rather than against you."* And that's because, when you're present, you're radiating peace ... even in the busyness and tragedies of life.

So yesterday, in the afternoon, I was at a celebration of life service: a memorial service. And then that night a wedding, Both had tears and laughter. I was present to both. The sacredness of life. The tears, the laughter, the love throughout life that we experience: being present to all of it. Because it's important to be present with that flow and express the Allness, the Oneness, the Godness, Spirit.

Here's what Eric Butterworth writes in *"Practical Metaphysics"*: *"Allness means right where you are right now. The most important thing to you -- the most important thing about your life and your involvement - is that you are living in an expression of the Allness of the Divine potential and it's constant. The totality of the universe is present where you are."*

If you're being present, then that Divine potential is constant. That the totality of the universe is present where you are. So returning to the knowing that you're a living expression of the One: the One Presence; the One Power. How do you want to express in any moment? That's intentional living; that's being present. How do I want to express as Divine potential in this moment?

And originally, Rev. Beci was scheduled to speak about love and living love; being an expression of love. And the truth is that, if you're being love -- being loving awareness -- then that is being present in the moment.

As I was driving to church yesterday for the celebration of life, thinking about my busy day ahead -- my full day -- I suddenly heard, *"Be where Spirit needs you."* Be where spirit needs you. If you're being where Spirit needs you, then you're being present. And we're always being called to be love; to being that expression of love. So if you're being where Spirit needs you, then you're being loving awareness. If you're being loving awareness, then you're being present.

So, this is how we become present to each moment. We break the time habit. We recognize it as an illusion. We catch our thoughts. What time is it? Now! We limit the outside input. We turn within. We listen. We take breaths. We breathe. We follow the breath. We take a long, slow inhalation, and a longer exhale. We meditate. Doesn't have to be perfect! We meditate. And, finally, we remember our divine essence. *"When I'm present, I'm connected to the Allness."*

And when you honor this now moment, it allows you to express God fully, love fully, with clarity of purpose. And that's what the world needs right now, my friends.

So it's a gift of presence that you give to yourself and others as the living, loving, awareness that you are. Your presence is a present to everyone. And so I bless you with that. Thank you, friends!