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# Mindfulness as an Effective Conceptual Tool for the Pastoral Care of Western Christians

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MINDFULNESS AS AN EFFECTIVE CONCEPTUAL TOOL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE  
OF WESTERN CHRISTIANS

Elizabeth Virostek

A Senior Honors Thesis project submitted to the Honors Program

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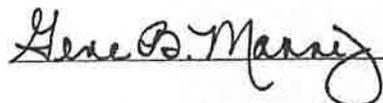
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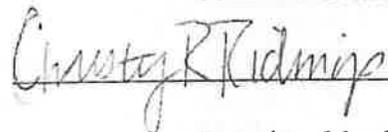
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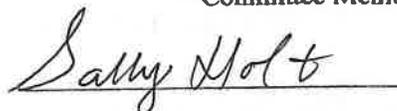
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## Introduction

There is no doubt that the postmodern secular Western culture is marked by the competition for efficiency and productivity, and that busyness is often marked as a measure of success. Some have gone as far to consider this an illness or epidemic of hurry and loneliness within our social fabric. Mindfulness has risen to become a method in which individuals have found they can pause, slow down, and combat this hurry sickness. James Martin, a Jesuit, states that

Savoring is an antidote to our increasingly rushed lives. We live in a busy world, with an emphasis on speed, efficiency, and productivity, and we often find ourselves hurriedly moving on to the next task at hand. Life becomes an endless series of tasks, and our day becomes a compendium of to-do lists. We become “human doings” instead of “human beings.”<sup>1</sup>

This savoring is an element of mindfulness not to be ignored. John Mark Comer continues this thread and uses a Biblical basis to call the 21st Century Western Christian back into this process of slowing down in his famous 2019 book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. He questions “could God be speaking to us even through our bodies?”<sup>2</sup> and states that the end of this hurry isn't solitude nor silence but to come back to ourselves and to come back to God.<sup>3</sup> Mindfulness is thought to aide this process of the soul returning to synchronicity with the body. The proposal that mindfulness and prayer can come together is consequently pertinent to the lives of Christians trying to seek the voice of God in a loud and complex world. It is especially implicated for the pastoral care of Western Christians in a variety of contexts. However, the 21st Century Western

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<sup>1</sup> James Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), 89.

<sup>2</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in Our Current Chaos* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2019), 130.

<sup>3</sup> John Mark Comer, 247.

Christian faces much conflict in approaching mindfulness as it is often criticized to be heresy within Christianity or simply appropriation of the ideas of other world religions.

## Defining Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a complex subject to approach, particularly as it can be defined in a variety of contexts through various methods in its complex and nuanced history. Even a quick Google search will yield a variety of definitions of this word. Likely to show up in this search for a definition is the public benefit corporation Mindful.org's definition of mindfulness as "the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us."<sup>4</sup> It will also yield Mayo Clinic's definition of mindfulness as

Mindfulness is a type of meditation in which you focus on being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment. Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress.<sup>5</sup>

This google search also could yield researcher and physician John Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness as "the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally."<sup>6</sup> These definitions exemplify many ways the complexities of mindfulness have been explained as a trait to be possessed or a state of mind one encompasses in a moment. Each of these definitions give a different understanding of what mindfulness is and

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<sup>4</sup> "What Is Mindfulness?" What is Mindfulness?. Mindful, September 24, 2020. <https://www.mindful.org/what-is-mindfulness/>.

<sup>5</sup> "Can Mindfulness Exercises Help Me?" Mayo Clinic. Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, September 15, 2020. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/consumer-health/in-depth/mindfulness-exercises/art-20046356#:~:text=Mindfulness%20is%20a%20type%20of,mind%20and%20help%20reduce%20stress.>

<sup>6</sup> Catherine Moore, "What Is Mindfulness? Definition + Benefits (Incl. Psychology)." PositivePsychology.com. PositivePsychology.com, October 13, 2020. <https://positivepsychology.com/what-is-mindfulness/>.

how it can be useful. However, it must be acknowledged that there is not a universal definition of this concept. While this can be confusing, it also shows the richness and depth of this abstract concept that has become the vast field of study seen today.

As shown through these definitions, mindfulness can be defined as a trait one possesses or as a state of mind one displays and presents. These two frameworks of mindfulness show its diversity in definition and approach. This distinction between trait and state is pertinent as the language surrounding mindfulness is pervasive and ubiquitous.

### **Separating Mindfulness from Meditation Practices**

While mindfulness is often practiced through methods of meditation, these practices and mindfulness as a concept are not synonymous. Mindfulness can be thought of as the all-encompassing field of study, as well as the state one enters or a trait they possess. Meditation however is a common set of methods for which mindfulness is practiced. Meditation practices alone come in many forms, including popularized and Westernized versions of yoga, vipassana meditation, Zen meditation, mantra meditation, chakra meditation, and more. Meditation practices are the most common way of practicing mindfulness, but the concept of mindfulness is much broader than just practice. This distinction is particularly helpful in the mitigation of criticisms of the appropriation of these religions into secular or other religious contexts, as the meditation practices often confused as representative of the whole field of mindfulness are representative specifically of certain religious and ethical codes.

### **Working Definition of Mindfulness for this Project**

The working definition of mindfulness for the scope of the rest of this project will be as follows: the trait or state of being present in the moment with the internal and external environment, including the physical body, emotions, surroundings, and cognition.

To further clarify the complex definition of the concept of mindfulness, trait mindfulness and state mindfulness will be separated when necessary. If mindfulness as a trait one possesses in their character is being discussed, the phrase ‘trait mindfulness’ will be used. If mindfulness as a state one enters in and out of in a moment of time is being discussed, the phrase ‘state mindfulness’ will be used. When generally referring to mindfulness, assume the definition above is being referenced in the following sections of this paper, especially as it pertains to the field of study and specific practices of mindfulness.

## Chapter One: Cultural Context of Mindfulness

“Part of the modernization of Buddhism was to describe it as a science of the mind so that the religious trappings were incidental and even disposable. This modernized Buddhism was designed to appeal to secularly minded people looking for ways to improve their lives.”

-Laurence Kirmayer<sup>7</sup>

The conceptualization of mindfulness is more approachable if the roots of mindfulness in Eastern religions are acknowledged. Especially as many practices of mindfulness in meditation stem from prominent spiritual aspects of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other Eastern religious understandings, the acknowledgement of these roots will help in the understanding and implementation of mindfulness into the lives of many. Particularly in implementing these ideas into contexts outside of their Eastern background into secular contexts, Christian contexts, or multicultural contexts, this process is key.

### Roots of Mindfulness

Mindfulness ideas have arisen over the ages from many sources. However, they arose most prominently through the Buddhist and Hindu thought which has become these two major world religions. These religions and ideas on their own are far from monolithic, yet in them emerges distinct patterns and ideas that have formed the roots of this field.

Hindu thought is considered the source of the earliest arising texts and ideas about mindfulness. The term ‘Hinduism’ was first used by British authors to describe the many Vedic traditions in the 1800s, which are some of the first texts in the history of Hinduism. Within this understanding, the term *Dhyana* is usually translated into common English as meditation, however it lends significantly more meaning in the context of the broader field of mindfulness. It

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<sup>7</sup> Laurence J. Kirmayer, “Mindfulness in Cultural Context,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 52, no. 4 (2015): pp. 447-469, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461515598949>.

often refers to a state of being and relationship with the divine and the world, with the basic understanding of a posture of stillness and silence.<sup>8</sup> Additionally from within Hindu thought is where the term ‘yoga’ derives. The popular culture view of yoga in the 21st century west however assumes that the practice of yoga is a physical well-being practice, and if it is spiritual at all it is presumed that it stems from a homogenous Hindu conceptualization. This is far from the truth, as there are many yogas within Hindu thought that serve a variety of purposes. Subsequently, the modern Western yoga movement has received much pushback from those who claim this is heretical for Christians to approach, or that it is mere appropriation of this religious tradition. This conflict is just one prominent example of the rhetoric surrounding mindfulness in the popular culture of the 21st century west and is exemplary of the nuance of the approach of mindfulness in the West.<sup>9</sup>

This history and conflict surrounding this becomes even more complicated when the influence of Buddhism is considered in the history of mindfulness. Buddhism and Hinduism share many ideas among each other and alongside other religions, yet Buddhism is not a subset of Hinduism.<sup>10</sup> Most notably one of these shared ideas is the concept of dharma, which is directly translated from Sanskrit as law or decree and is the idea that there is some aspect of universality of life, and especially of truth.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Buddhism like Hinduism is also far from monolithic, and includes the three main schools of Vajrayana, Mahayana, and Theravada

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<sup>8</sup> Joaquin Selva, “History of Mindfulness: From East to West and Religion to Science.” PositivePsychology.com, September 1, 2020. <https://positivepsychology.com/history-of-mindfulness/>.

<sup>9</sup> A. R. Jain, “Who Is to Say Modern Yoga Practitioners Have It All Wrong? on Hindu Origins and Yogaphobia,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 2 (2014): pp. 427-471, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lft099>.

<sup>10</sup> Joaquin Selva, “History of Mindfulness: From East to West and Religion to Science.”

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism is most noted in the West as it is a branch of Vajrayana and the tradition from which the Dalai Lama teaches<sup>12</sup>. Within each of these traditions are many ideas and practices that are emphasized. However, each of them stems from the teachings of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, as the exemplar of this path to Nirvana freedom and consider mindfulness to be the first step toward enlightenment. The term mindfulness is often considered a word-to-word translation for the Pali term Sati<sup>13</sup> within this tradition, or the Sanskrit work *smṛti* encompassing attention, memory, remembrance.<sup>14</sup>

The Buddhist tradition reveals the concepts of the four noble truths and the eightfold path to enlightenment. The four noble truths are simplified as follows, that first, the life of the human is marked by suffering, or the concept of *dukkha*, second, suffering is caused by striving, third, the end of *dukkha* suffering is possible through the letting go of desire and attachment, and finally fourth, this process is possible by the eightfold path. The eightfold path includes the ethics of right speech, right action, and right livelihood, the concentration of right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration, and the wisdom of right view and right thought.<sup>15</sup> The concept of *dukkha* emphasizes that suffering is multifaceted and involves not only physical pain and suffering but even more so mental suffering as expressed in discontentment and a lack of ease in life. These concepts have great importance as they shed light on the idea that the human experience is marked by some level of human suffering. All world religions attempt to reconcile

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<sup>12</sup> Joaquin Selva, "History of Mindfulness: From East to West and Religion to Science." PositivePsychology.com, September 1, 2020. <https://positivepsychology.com/history-of-mindfulness/>

<sup>13</sup> Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*. Somerville, (MA: Wisdom Publications, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Laurence J. Kirmayer, "Mindfulness in Cultural Context," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 52, no. 4 (2015): pp. 447-469, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461515598949>.

<sup>15</sup> Laurence J. Kirmayer, "Mindfulness in Cultural Context."

this suffering in their ethical codes though they do so in different manners based on the conceptualization of the soul and its relation to the world and the divine. Thus, in Buddhism the values of nonattachment and non-striving that emerge in mindfulness offer a deeper understanding the concept of *dukkha* and how it operates in the four noble truths and eightfold path to enlightenment. Simply, as it pertains to mindfulness, *dukkha* is the basis of the need for mindfulness and meditation practice.

However, it is impossible to even speak of mindfulness in a distinctly Buddhist manner as it is so multifaceted and has so many connecting points with other schools of thought<sup>16</sup>. Though mindfulness has emerged from this context, it serves a variety of purposes and thus is defined in numerous fashions. Additionally, mindfulness concepts are found in Daoist, Zen, Sikh, Confucian, and other ideas from primarily Eastern traditions as well as being found in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Mysticism and meditation are found in many forms and contribute to the broader understanding of mindfulness in the cultural context of the 21st century west. Many consider an understanding of all these traditions and the values they hold to be important for practitioners to avoid the tendency toward “dogmatic factionalism”<sup>17</sup> and protect against appropriation. Dogmatic factionalism points to the tendency to create separate groups or factions as a result of conflict between differing beliefs rather than find common ground in agreed upon ideas. This tendency can be incredibly dangerous to the conversations surrounding religious thought as it is deeply personal and has a great impact on the daily lives of many, thus a

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<sup>16</sup> Bhikku Analayo, “Mindfulness in Different Buddhist Traditions,” in *Insight Journal*, (2016), <https://www.buddhistinquiry.org/article/mindfulness-in-different-buddhist-traditions/>.

<sup>17</sup> Bhikku Analayo, “Mindfulness in Different Buddhist Traditions,” in *Insight Journal*, (2016),

mutual understanding and respect for the beliefs of others is integral to the approach of mindfulness.

### **Mindfulness Moving West and Appropriation**

The 1960s and 1970's were marked by an interest and experimentation in meditative techniques within psychotherapy, but it was not until late into the 1970s that mindfulness was studied as an intervention within the field of clinical psychology.<sup>18</sup> John Kabat-Zinn has been awarded the most accolades and fame for bringing mindfulness westward and into popularity within psychotherapy as he after studying mindfulness ideas under Thich Nhat Hanh and others combined these ideas with those of psychological science in the West. This process made logical sense as Buddhism is universalist in nature, meaning it is broadly approachable and applicable to all of humanity. It thus makes claims about the nature of humanity with important implications for the field of psychology as it pertains to the understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals.<sup>19</sup> Jack Kornfield, Sharon Salzberg, and Joseph Goldstein also played a crucial role in bringing mindfulness to the West, particularly as they founded the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in 1975, which is a non-profit organization to study Buddhism in the United States<sup>20</sup>.

As mindfulness was brought westward, it was adapted to the postmodern culture of the 20th and 21st century. The Western conception of mindfulness today is different in process,

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<sup>18</sup> Shian-Ling Keng, Moria J. Smoski, and Clive J. Robins, "Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Health: A Review of Empirical Studies," *Clinical Psychology Review* 31, no. 6 (2011): pp. 1041-1056, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2011.04.006>.

<sup>19</sup> Laurence J. Kirmayer, "Mindfulness in Cultural Context," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 52, no. 4 (2015): pp. 447-469, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461515598949>.

<sup>20</sup> Joaquin Selva, "History of Mindfulness: From East to West and Religion to Science." PositivePsychology.com, September 1, 2020. <https://positivepsychology.com/history-of-mindfulness/>.

context, and content than that of traditional Eastern mindfulness<sup>21</sup>, though many of the core ideas and themes are the same. The differences however are notable because the Western conceptualization is primarily within a secular context and not tied to any particular philosophy or code of ethics.<sup>22</sup> The Western secular exercise practice of yoga is the most frequent and obvious example that has been adapted into the daily life of many, which shows the stark differences between mindfulness based Eastern religious practice and mindfulness based Western practices.<sup>23</sup> It seems that as mindfulness moved west, perhaps the roots of mindfulness were downplayed for the sake of broader application to many and in the creation of psychological interventions applicable to the scientific and medical field.

Leading expert on cultural psychiatry Laurence Kirmayer claims that “part of the modernization of Buddhism was to describe it as a science of the mind so that the religious trappings were incidental and even disposable. This modernized Buddhism was designed to appeal to secularly minded people looking for ways to improve their lives.”<sup>24</sup> With the rise of the self-help movement and the common pursuit of happiness, conflating the Buddhist concept of mindfulness with the pursuit of happiness or self-help seems to be vastly off track from the original intent of the concept. Buddhism seeks to end suffering through detachment and the negation of the self-leading to enlightenment instead of the rise of the self above the rest. This

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<sup>21</sup> Shian-Ling Keng, Moria J. Smoski, and Clive J. Robins, “Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Health: A Review of Empirical Studies,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 31, no. 6 (2011): pp. 1041-1056, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2011.04.006>.

<sup>22</sup> Shian-Ling Keng, Moria J. Smoski, and Clive J. Robins, “Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Health: A Review of Empirical Studies.”

<sup>23</sup> Joaquin Selva, “History of Mindfulness: From East to West and Religion to Science.” PositivePsychology.com, September 1, 2020. <https://positivepsychology.com/history-of-mindfulness/>.

<sup>24</sup> Laurence J. Kirmayer, “Mindfulness in Cultural Context,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 52, no. 4 (2015): pp. 447-469, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461515598949>.

derailment of the original intent of these ideas has implications for larger conversations surrounding the movement of ideas from a more collectivist shame culture to an individualist honor culture that extend far beyond the scope of this project. However, it is pertinent because the self-help movement is so prominent in the 21st century West and the secularization of mindfulness has largely been embedded within the rise of this set of ideas. Today, the field of mindfulness is a large blend of religious thought, with many considering themselves to be ‘Jew-Bu’s’ as they blend the thought of Judaism and Buddhism<sup>25</sup>. Many forms and practices of spirituality are present and engaging with one another within the scope of mindfulness.

Acknowledging the roots of these ideas and then how they are present in the religious and secular contexts of 21st century Western society assists in the process of combatting appropriation of them in harmful ways. Understanding the tendency toward dogmatic factionalism is also integral, as it reminds individuals to value the beliefs of all as precious. It is a common criticism in the secular postmodern Western application of mindfulness that the use of these ideas is simply based in their utility without respect of those who are within the religious communities where these ideas arise. This coupled with the colonialist and capitalist value of competition found in this context lends weight to the criticism of unjustly appropriating these ideas without forethought to the implications for those within the religious contexts these ideas stem from. Professor Andrea R. Jain sheds light on this competitive value in claiming that many attempt to “convince Christians that religious conflict is inevitable if they embrace yoga, given the irreconcilable differences between *them* (i.e., Hindus) and *us* (i.e., Christians). And some American Christians add that yoga's popularization contributes to the establishment of a “post-Christian” nation, something Americans should fear.” The goal of the use of mindfulness

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<sup>25</sup> Dan Harris, *10% Happier - How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works- a True Story*. 5th Anniversary ed. (Harper Collins, 2019).

in this field is not to appropriate these ideas and to claim them as one's own, or to combat the value of other religious thought, but to utilize the basis of understanding from their first conceptions as it informs our knowledge of the person and life, as these ideas have enriched the world in vastly productive ways to the benefit of the health of many.

Buddhism and other religious and ethical schools of thought where mindfulness stems from should not be considered a psychology, as this limits the moral and ethical components of this religious and philosophical thought.<sup>26</sup> Buddhism ought to be respected in the history and implementation of this field in its influence as a religious tradition, in its cultural practices, and in the identities, individuals find within these. This school of thought is universal in nature, yet it is being secularized to the point of being thought of only as a psychology or philosophy, which is an insensitive appropriation of these ideas. This is not to say that psychology does not have moral or ethical implications, but that it separates personal ethics from professional and practical ethics. The goals of Buddhism in the application of mindfulness differ greatly from those of clinical psychology or pastoral care, and acknowledging these differences is important in utilizing these ideas in a culturally sensitive manner. Particularly as studying, practicing, and implementing mindfulness will always be within a social context, doing so well is important.

Explaining this rich and complicated history in depth goes far beyond the scope of this project and is a worthy field to study on its own. Mindfulness as a field is rich in depth and its many nuances, practices, and terms have filled the pages of numerous other pieces of literature. It is an integral process in entering into the field of mindfulness to engage with the Eastern religious roots that have formed the basis and language of this field, and this ought to be approached seriously by practitioners. The adoption of these ideas into the postmodern West and

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<sup>26</sup> Laurence J. Kirmayer, "Mindfulness in Cultural Context," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 52, no. 4 (2015): pp. 447-469, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461515598949>.

into the field of psychological science has become an incredible therapeutic tool. Thus, it is only just to observe and interact with them when their roots are taken into careful consideration, and those who took the time to pass down these ideas are given credit where due.

## Chapter Two: Overview of Mindfulness in Clinical Psychology

“There is a clear convergence of findings from correlational studies, clinical intervention studies, and laboratory-based, experimental studies of mindfulness—all of which suggest that mindfulness is positively associated with psychological health, and that training in mindfulness may bring about positive psychological effects.”

-Keng, Smoski, and Robins<sup>27</sup>

The field of clinical psychology is involved in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mental disorders, as outlined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). This field is ever-evolving as the body of knowledge grows and new understandings and treatment modalities are formed through the scientific process. Thus, clinical psychology has gone through many phases and trends of treatment methods thought to be most effective. As more research is conducted and more is known about the brain, behaviors, and factors at play in mental disorders, the scientific cycle continues of knowledge leading to implementation, which then leads to evaluation and subsequently more knowledge to be implemented. In recent history and scientific understanding, mindfulness has been utilized as an effective tool within this field and has shown to be an effective treatment for certain disorders. Publications in the field of psychology specifically about mindfulness have absolutely skyrocketed in recent decades as it has been developed as a treatment modality. Primarily these publications involve the creation and evaluation of mindfulness-based interventions for clinical use in the field.

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<sup>27</sup> Shian-Ling Keng, Moria J. Smoski, and Clive J. Robins, “Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Health: A Review of Empirical Studies,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 31, no. 6 (2011): pp. 1041-1056, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2011.04.006>.

## Mindfulness Based Interventions

Mindfulness based therapies within clinical psychology are such that mindfulness meditation practices are taught as a part of the treatment protocol in an explicit way.<sup>28</sup> The most well-known of these treatment protocols using mindfulness include mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).<sup>29</sup> Some are currently formalized practices and others are still being developed as specific protocols. As the research into the effectiveness of mindfulness within these interventions is growing the specific effects are becoming understood more deeply. John Kabat-Zinn is one of the primary researchers within the Mindfulness Based Intervention field, and thus his work is integral to the understanding of how MBI practice is utilized and understood in clinical psychology and psychotherapy settings.<sup>30</sup>

### MBSR

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction or MBSR was developed by John Kabat-Zinn and his colleagues in 1979. It involves an eight-week group program meeting weekly as well as a 6 hour silent retreat. It involves the teaching of many informal and formal meditative practices and methods of mindfulness including the body scan, sitting meditation and walking meditation, and *metta* loving-kindness practice.<sup>31</sup> The focus of MBSR is specifically about the attitude and

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<sup>28</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*. 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2017), 49.

<sup>29</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*.

<sup>30</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn, "Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future." *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 10, no. 2 (2003): 144–56. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpg016>.

<sup>31</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*.

cognitive processes of an individual about the trials they face than it is about symptom reduction. It is thought to bridge the potential and common gap between the behavioral and the cognitive.<sup>32</sup> It was created for and found to be effective for those who have not traditionally responded to other therapies, particularly for chronic pain patients.

## MBCT

Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy, or MBCT, is also an eight-week group program focused on mindfulness. However, it is usually led in smaller groups than those of MBSR and differentiates from MBSR in focusing on understanding depression rather than focusing on understanding stress and stress responses. It also incorporates other cognitive therapy elements beyond that of MBSR. MBCT was originally intended for the prevention of relapse in depression patients, and was created in the late 1990s by John Teasdale, Mark Williams, and Zindel Segal who were experts in using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for patients with depression. It has shown to be effective in preventing relapse in depression patients as originally intended, and has shown to be effective in participants who are currently depressed.<sup>33</sup>

## Other Mindfulness Based Interventions

Other mindfulness-based therapies exist for more specialized parts of life, or for more specified populations of patients. One such example is mindful eating, which has largely been adopted into the popularized practices of intuitive eating. The incorporation of mindfulness into art therapy, leading to the terminology of Mindfulness-Based Art Therapy (MBAT), has been shown to reduce anxiety symptoms especially in populations with Generalized Anxiety Disorder

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<sup>32</sup> Laurence J. Kirmayer, "Mindfulness in Cultural Context," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 52, no. 4 (2015): pp. 447-469, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461515598949>.

<sup>33</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*. 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2017), 71.

and specific medical populations.<sup>34</sup> It is especially effective for pain patients, such as those in cancer recovery, and is actively being studied in other populations as it is thought to have great therapeutic potential.

Therapies such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) did not stem theoretically from mindfulness but incorporate mindfulness in practice.<sup>35</sup> DBT was developed as a specific treatment option for borderline personality disorder (BPD). It centralizes on balancing opposing ideas in life and includes formal mindfulness teachings and techniques as one of the four central modules. Within this module are three states of mind, the reasonable mind, the emotional mind, and the wise mind respectively, and the six mindfulness skills of observing, describing, participating, nonjudgmentally, one-mindedly, and effectively. ACT originated from relational frame theory and attempts to target dysfunctional thoughts.<sup>36</sup>

### **Neuroscience and Benefits of Mindfulness**

The research surrounding mindfulness has grown exponentially given the evidence that mindfulness is beneficial in a variety of ways, particularly as interventions are implemented in treatment. As a result, many inventories and scales have been formed to measure mindfulness in an empirical manner. Some of the most popular of these include the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI), Kentucky Inventory of

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<sup>34</sup> Megan E Beerse et al., “Biobehavioral Utility of Mindfulness-Based Art Therapy: Neurobiological Underpinnings and Mental Health Impacts,” *Experimental Biology and Medicine* 245, no. 2 (2019): pp. 122-130, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1535370219883634>.

<sup>35</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*. 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2017), 60-62.

<sup>36</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*.

Mindfulness Skills (KIMS), Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, and more. Inventories differ in their approaches to studying mindfulness as a trait or state, and as a single or a multi-faceted construct.<sup>37</sup> Each, however, allows the field to better understand how mindfulness is related to other variables and outcomes.

Research regarding mindfulness has demonstrated numerous effects to the body and brain thought to be beneficial. It has been associated with a higher level of well-being both empirically and theoretically in a variety of studies. Practice in mindfulness has been linked to health outcomes such as chronic pain reduction, higher quality sleep, decreased rumination, decreased anxiety, and decreased depression.<sup>38</sup> Trait mindfulness specifically has been associated with the personality traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness, and overall greater levels of life satisfaction. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that mindfulness is negatively correlated with depression, neuroticism, dissociation, rumination, social anxiety, difficulty in emotional regulation, and more.<sup>39</sup> Studies even suggest that “it does not take extensive prior training in mindfulness to experience some immediate benefits of mindfulness training,”<sup>40</sup> which is especially encouraging for the clinician and the client in application of mindfulness.

Current research, in line with the growing understanding of positive psychology, is attempting to understand the correlation between mindfulness and processes that are thought to

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<sup>37</sup> Shian-Ling Keng, Moria J. Smoski, and Clive J. Robins, “Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Health: A Review of Empirical Studies,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 31, no. 6 (2011): pp. 1041-1056, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2011.04.006>.

<sup>38</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*. 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2017).

<sup>39</sup> Shian-Ling Keng, Moria J. Smoski, and Clive J. Robins, “Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Health: A Review of Empirical Studies.”

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

be factors of psychological health. One such example is the relationship between mindfulness and the ability to let go of negative thoughts, thought to be a protective factor against the development of emotional disorders.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, neuroscience research specifically is attempting to better understand what exactly occurs in the brain and in the Central Nervous System (CNS) when mindfulness is practiced. According to many studies, “mindfulness-based meditation practices are now known to engage selective brain areas and neural networks involved in attention, body awareness, emotion regulation and the sense of self.”<sup>42</sup> It is thought thus far that mindfulness can settle the brain and body by activating the parasympathetic nervous system, having a cascade of effects in the brain. The specifics of how this occurs in the body and the brain will hopefully be better understood through further research. In the brain however, trait mindfulness has shown to be associated with amygdala and prefrontal cortical activation opposite of that of depressive symptoms,<sup>43</sup> as well as being associated with higher levels of connectivity between regions implicated in self-monitoring and cognitive control.<sup>44</sup> This indicates that mindfulness may have a key impact on or association with these brain areas.

Finally, mindfulness has demonstrated efficacy in treatment within a variety of helping professions. Specific research has been primarily done in the implementation of mindfulness-based interventions. Much of the research is oriented towards the treatment interventions

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<sup>41</sup> Shian-Ling Keng, Moria J. Smoski, and Clive J. Robins, “Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Health: A Review of Empirical Studies.” *Clinical Psychology Review* 31, no. 6 (2011): pp. 1041-1056, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2011.04.006>.

<sup>42</sup> Laura Schmalzl, Mardi A. Crane-Godreau, and Peter Payne, “Movement-Based Embodied Contemplative Practices: Definitions and Paradigms,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00205>.

<sup>43</sup> Shian-Ling Keng, Moria J. Smoski, and Clive J. Robins, “Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Health: A Review of Empirical Studies.”

<sup>44</sup> Laura Schmalzl, Mardi A. Crane-Godreau, and Peter Payne, “Movement-Based Embodied Contemplative Practices: Definitions and Paradigms.”

outlined above, as they are evaluated for effectiveness and efficacy in the treatment of mental disorders as outlined by the current DSM. These treatments have been shown to be extremely effective, and more research is in progress and expanding exponentially to better understand these effects. Mindfulness is often proposed as most effective in a combination treatment method with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy interventions for mental disorders, with most effectiveness found in the treatment of anxiety and depression.<sup>45</sup> Thus, mindfulness is currently being referenced in many common textbooks regarding abnormal and clinical psychology, and actively studied to show effectiveness and efficacy in treatment. As interventions are being created to target specific maladaptive tendencies and disorders, this effectiveness research is imperative to the growth of the field.

Overall, mindfulness has shown to be beneficial in a variety of ways for a breadth of individuals. A metaanalysis of the current research in mindfulness claimed that

Despite existing methodological limitations within each body of literature, there is a clear convergence of findings from correlational studies, clinical intervention studies, and laboratory-based, experimental studies of mindfulness—all of which suggest that mindfulness is positively associated with psychological health, and that training in mindfulness may bring about positive psychological effects.<sup>46</sup>

This is extremely encouraging for the field that the empirical studies are continually validating the effects of mindfulness in very positive ways. It is predicted that the research and implementation cycle regarding mindfulness will likely continue to expand into more

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<sup>45</sup> Timothy J. Trull, and Mitchell J. Prinstein. *Clinical Psychology*; Ronald J. Comer, and Jonathan S. Comer. *Abnormal Psychology (10th Ed.)*. (New York: Worth Publishers/Macmillan Learning, 2018); Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*.

<sup>46</sup> Shian-Ling Keng, Moria J. Smoski, and Clive J. Robins, “Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Health: A Review of Empirical Studies,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 31, no. 6 (2011): pp. 1041-1056, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2011.04.006>.

and more populations, allowing many to harness the benefits. Thus, in all of the specific uses of mindfulness within the treatment focused practices of clinical psychology, mindfulness informed therapy and therapists are essential.

### **The Mindful Therapist**

Mindfulness techniques have also been proposed as influential for the therapist as they engage in the leadership of a variety of therapies and engagements with clients. Particularly as the rapport of the client-practitioner relationship has shown to be integrally important in the effectiveness of psychotherapy, the benefits of a mindful therapist are great.<sup>47</sup> Mindfulness allows for the therapist to hold the most space for their clients as they actively engage with them and will allow them to best create a non-judgmental environment. Mindfulness is beneficial to the practitioner because of its effects on attention, attitude, self-compassion, empathy, emotional regulation, and attunement.<sup>48</sup> Thus mindfulness training has been suggested as a helpful support to develop the clinical skills of therapists in their personal lives and in the active care of clients.

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<sup>47</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*. 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2017).

<sup>48</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*.

### Chapter Three: Can mindfulness be practiced by Western Christians?

“A great deal of Christian meditation is unrecognized as meditation. It is called by other names, forgotten by history, or known to one denomination but not to others.”

-Avery Brooke<sup>49</sup>

Mindfulness as rooted in Eastern religious thought raises the question of whether it can be practiced by modern Western Christians in a religious and theologically sound manner or not. Some have approached resolving this conflict by merely practicing mindfulness in a secular manner which has led to the extreme of appropriation, and others have negated these mindful practices altogether by considering them to be ‘buffet Buddhism.’ and not something meant to be practiced by Christians.<sup>50</sup> In harsher language, they consider this to be heresy. Andrea R. Jain, a religious studies professor, claims that as it applies to yoga, “for some protesters, this means that Christians must choose Christianity over yoga lest they defy Christian doctrine and jeopardize the status of their souls as well as Christianity's place in the world. For others, this means that postural yoga can be reduced to a profit-driven market featuring products that corrupt an authentic Hindu system.”<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, some have claimed that entirely negating mindfulness is an inaccurate Christology of interacting with other religious ideas and extra-religious ideas, meaning that it is not of the way and life of Jesus.<sup>52</sup> Clifton Stringer claims that “we worry that

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<sup>49</sup> Avery Brooke. *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Practice of Christian Meditation*, Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 1986.10

<sup>50</sup> Clifton Stringer, “Buffet Buddhism and Contemplative Christianity,” *Ministry Matters*, March 11, 2019. <https://www-ministrymatters-com.idm.oclc.org/all/entry/9525/buffet-buddhism-and-contemplative-christianity>.

<sup>51</sup> A. R. Jain, “Who Is to Say Modern Yoga Practitioners Have It All Wrong? on Hindu Origins and Yogaphobia,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 2 (2014): pp. 427-471, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lft099>.

<sup>52</sup> Clifton Stringer, “Buffet Buddhism and Contemplative Christianity.”

taking up, say, Buddhist meditation will water down our Christian practice or faith, but this is an uncritical, fearful, sectarian posture: it is supposed that these practices are Christian, and so holy, since Christians have a history of doing them; and those practices are pagan, and so unholy, because Christians don't have a history of doing them. That's an inadequately Christological way to think about the world.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, the question of if and how Christians can approach mindfulness remains, as the tensions felt by Christians between the purpose and effects of mindfulness concepts and the roots of mindfulness in Eastern religions are palpable.<sup>54</sup>

It is clear from the research done in neuroscience that mindfulness is beneficial, so negating it altogether would be a loss of the potential to reap these benefits. Furthermore, there is great evidence that prayer impacts the brain in positive ways, and that prayer of the nature that engages individuals in the present moment more deeply increases this effect.<sup>55</sup> Thus, it ought to be considered if mindfulness is even compatible with Christianity, and question how the realm of mindfulness may have been present in Christianity since its origins. Many have tackled this task in both practical and doctrinal approaches. Some go as far to say that “a great deal of Christian meditation is unrecognized as meditation. It is called by other names, forgotten by history, or known to one denomination but not to others.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, it is of considerable importance to consider the potential history of mindfulness within Christianity itself. When one looks closely at

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<sup>53</sup> Clifton Stringer, “Buffet Buddhism and Contemplative Christianity,” *Ministry Matters*, March 11, 2019. <https://www-ministrymatters-com.idm.oclc.org/all/entry/9525/buffet-buddhism-and-contemplative-christianity>.

<sup>54</sup> “Mindfulness: A Christian Approach,” *Focus on the Family*, September 22, 2020. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/mindfulness-a-christian-approach/>.

<sup>55</sup> Tom Schwartz, “Proof for the Power of Prayer.” *Ministry Matters*, September 30, 2013. <https://www-ministrymatters-com.idm.oclc.org/all/entry/4277/proof-for-the-power-of-prayer>.

<sup>56</sup> Avery Brooke. *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Practice of Christian Meditation*, Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 1986.10

the possibility of mindfulness already being present in the Bible and in Christian practice, a wealth of examples and similarities arise.

### **Mindfulness in the Bible**

From the very beginning in Genesis, creation is God spoken and God breathed. Genesis 2:7 states that the breath of life was breathed by God into the nostrils of man and as a result he was no longer dust but came alive. There are abundant references to this sustaining force of human life from the spirit of God, the breath of God, coming from the Hebrew word *ruach* translated to the common English words of breath, spirit, and wind. To give some examples, Job claims that the spirit of God formed him and the breath of God gives him life (Job 33:4), the Psalms numerously claim the breath of God as life creating and life sustaining, the winds and breath of God bring the dry bones back to life in Ezekiel 37. All the way to Revelation these references are found in the Bible. These cannot be missed as references to the sustaining power of breath, the anchor of mindful practice.

Not only does breath matter in the Bible, but the body itself is integrally important. It is clear that God cares about the human body from creation, to the incarnation of Jesus as fully human and fully God taking on flesh, to the new bodies of resurrection that will one day come. In creation, in incarnation, and in resurrection the human body is at the center of the experience of humanity. Then, we are told that partaking of the body and blood of Christ as an act of remembrance, of participating in the body of Christ with our own bodies in communion, is a ritual we should hold onto. It is one that is present in every major denomination of Christianity. The mindful experience of inhabiting one's body fully to be most fully human and to connect intimately with God and to mindfully eat of the Lord's supper is clear in both the Bible and in Christian practice.

Finally, there is ample evidence in the rhythms God creates for us in the world that mindfulness is a natural and cherished part of the communion humanity ought to have with God. With the establishment of the Sabbath as a commandment, and God Himself participating in the Sabbath at the close of creation, humanity is instructed to rest in the completed work of God in the world and in the presence of God Himself. Thich Nhat Hanh in *Living Buddha Living Christ* explains it as such:

I like the expression “resting in God.” When you pray with all your heart, the Holy Spirit is in you, and as you continue to pray, the Holy Spirit continues in you. You do not need to do anything else. As long as the Holy Spirit is there, everything is fine. You are resting in God, and God will work in you. For transformation to take place, you only need to allow the Holy Spirit to stay in you. The Holy Spirit is the energy of God that shines forth and shows you the way. You can see things deeply, understand deeply, and love deeply.<sup>57</sup>

This illustrates the way in which resting in God is a mindful practice, and one of significance. This resting in God seems to reset the Christian in the deepening understanding that God, and the Kingdom of God is within us as Luke 17 informs. This unity and communion with God and others is integral in the understanding of interconnectedness within mindfulness.

### **Mindfulness in the Church and Christian Practice**

Additionally, there is evidence that the scriptures are meant to be content to be meditated on. In the early church and in the days of the church fathers when literacy rates were not high, and printed Bibles in many languages were not readily available it is particularly implicated that Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, most prominently found in Matthew 5-7, was seen as a piece to meditate on.<sup>58</sup> This specific piece of scripture, one of the most prominent glimpses of the public

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<sup>57</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York, NY: Riverhead, 1997). 181

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Pennington, “3 Things You Didn't Know About the Sermon on the Mount.” *The Gospel Coalition- Bible & Theology*, November 16, 2017. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/3-things-didnt-know-sermon-mount/>.

teaching and life of Jesus being seen as something to memorize and reflect on and meditate on the words is incredibly impactful. Especially as this was a prominent part of the practice of the early church, there is evidence for the church today that scripture is meant to be more than read, but actively engaged with and meditated on.

Mindfulness also has emerged in the practice of Christianity, perhaps in more ways than often anticipated, in addition to being referenced in numerous ways in the words of the Bible.

Avery Brooke in *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Practice of Christian Meditation* states that

Probably the most common form of Christian meditation is a practice that arises so naturally that it is seldom written about. Certainly, countless Christians have often centered their thoughts and feelings on a word, a short prayer, or a verse of the Bible. The words may have been consciously chosen, but this is often not a planned method of meditation but rather a movement of the Holy Spirit within a seeking human being. Unbidden, a word or verse comes to mind on awaking. In response you turn it over in your mind slowly, seeing new facets, new meanings. In the middle of the day, it comes back to you, perhaps this time with a sudden insight concerning your own life. After a while you may find yourself purposely bringing it to mind. This may go on for a day or several- or even for many weeks- and then fade away to be replaced perhaps by another word, perhaps by silence.<sup>59</sup>

This is just one example of how a Christian may be using the practice of mindfulness even in their daily life without naming it as such. Christians often use pieces of scripture as a mantra, something they repeatedly recall and bring to attention that returns them to the truth about God, themselves, and the world. This is a mindfulness practice at work, even if one does not consciously know it to be mindfulness.

Largely in the contemplative sphere of Christianity, other practices of uncanny similarity to mindfulness and meditation are present. Some of these practices include centering prayer, lectio divina, and the practice of Examen. Centering prayer has even been noted by some as the

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<sup>59</sup> Avery Brooke. *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Practice of Christian Meditation*, (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 1986).  
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“overlooked form of mindful practice that grows out of the Christian tradition.”<sup>60</sup> These Christian practices employ similar strategies to traditionally mindfulness-based meditation practices such as attending to the breath. However, they often have a different end goal, towards the greater understanding of God’s presence and revelation in the world. The richness in this stream of Christianity is vast, and often overlooked in the postmodern Western ideology of Christianity marked by evangelicalism.

Additionally, much of the liturgy of the Christian church returns individuals to mindful moments. Not every Christian church considers themselves to be liturgical, however they all employ some elements of liturgy in establishing routines to gathering. Liturgy itself seems to connect with mindfulness in idea as it establishes a routine and mood for a worship setting and offers helpful guidelines for gathering and practice. Particularly the presence of silence in liturgy is important in offering space to hear the Lord speak.<sup>61</sup> Many say that “God speaks in whispers... but to hear whispers takes listening”<sup>62</sup> and the silence in liturgy and the spaces one makes for silence in their lives allows for Christians to listen to those whispers of God. Also, there are often repeated words in services of all denominations of a meditative nature, many of which are universally spoken words of Christian worship including ‘Lord have mercy,’ ‘Christ have mercy,’ the Latin phrase ‘Kyrie Eleison’ and the like.<sup>63</sup> All of these contribute to the meditative

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<sup>60</sup> P. Gregg Blanton, “The Other Mindful Practice: Centering Prayer & Psychotherapy.” *Pastoral Psychology* 60, no. 1, (2010): 133–47, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-010-0292-9>.

<sup>61</sup> Avery Brooke. *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Practice of Christian Meditation*, (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 1986). 63-65.

<sup>62</sup> Avery Brooke. *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Practice of Christian Meditation*, 24.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 65, 68, 74.

nature of the rhythm of a weekly Christian service or mass, and increase the mindful attitude in the already established practices of the Church that Christians participate in regularly.

It is clear that in Christianity, spiritual disciplines and the practice of Christianity ought to be engaging for the mind, body, and spirit. Each of the sacraments Christians participate in serves the purpose of returning the Christian to the central presence and character of God in the world. For example, the practice of communion can be thought of as a demonstration of mindful eating as one engages the body, mind, and spirit in the Eucharistic practice. Thus, it ought to be considered that mindfulness and Christianity are not incompatible in theory or practice.

### **Distinguishing Christian Mindfulness: Intention**

What distinguishes Christian mindfulness from the secular or Eastern religious mindfulness practice however is the aspect of intention. The famous 20th century monk Thomas Merton has famously said that the practice of “Centering Prayer is not done with attention but with *intention*.”<sup>64</sup> To add a certain intentionality to the baseline attention of mindfulness practice allows Christians to center themselves on the presence of God within themselves and the world and to find the space of the divine in what might seemingly be a void of silence otherwise. This intention protects against the all too common criticism of mindfulness practices being those of self-centeredness and selfishness, a vice Christians are told to flee from. This is not to say that non-Christian or secular mindfulness practice is without intention. The intention in Christian mindfulness is differentiated from the rest in the aspect of meeting God in practice. Intention allows this attention to become religious in practice as an attitude of reverence, holiness, and

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<sup>64</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault, “Centering Prayer- Intention.” Center for Action and Contemplation, February 6, 2017. <https://cac.org/intention-2017-02-15/>.

seeking of the divine is present in the practitioner.<sup>65</sup> With this, Christians are even able to bless naturally meditative secular activities for the purpose of Christian meditation including things like mindful walking, eating, and more.

Furthermore, the distinction in the IAA model of mindfulness with the three aspects of Intention, Attention, and Attitude these differences become clear. Each of these aspects is thought to be interwoven into a cyclical process, with mindfulness being the all-encompassing whole of the process.<sup>66</sup> Intention is not striving but like setting the compass in the heart for where the practitioner desires to go with and through their practice. Attention is the aspect of observing the processes of the mind, body, spirit, and environment, and attitude is the focus on how one attends to these things and their practice.<sup>67</sup> Thus by nature of these processes the Christian in intention, attention, and attitude can participate in mindfulness in a uniquely Christian manner.

With a deeper look it becomes clearer that Christians can approach mindfulness in a uniquely Christian way that is not merely adopting a kind of pseudo-Buddhism that can be criticized as either heresy or appropriation. Additionally, in returning to the biggest criticisms of Christians utilizing mindfulness of appropriation and heresy, it is clear that Christians can approach mindfulness in a culturally informed and competent careful manner. A Christian mindfulness is present in the Bible, and Christians can and should use mindfulness as a

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<sup>65</sup> Avery Brooke. *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Practice of Christian Meditation*, (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 1986), 16.

<sup>66</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*. 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2017), 14.

<sup>67</sup> Shauna L. Shapiro and Linda E. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*.

descriptor for their faith and their experience of God.<sup>68</sup> To meditate and live a life of in the moment prayer is to live deeply and grow in experiential faith,<sup>69</sup> and mindfulness is a powerful language and toolbox to help Christians harness the power of their connection with God daily and in times of struggle.

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<sup>68</sup> Aloysius Pieris, SJ, "Spirituality as Mindfulness: Biblical and Buddhist Approaches." *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 10, no. 1 (2010): 38-51. doi:10.1353/scs.0.0082.

<sup>69</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in Our Current Chaos* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2019). 153, 178.

#### Chapter Four: Rapprochement of mindfulness in pastoral care settings

“To take good care of yourself and to take good care of living beings and of the environment is the best way to love God. This love is possible when there is the understanding that you are not separate from other beings or the environment. This understanding cannot be merely intellectual. It must be experiential, the insight gained by deep touching and deep looking in a daily life of prayer, contemplation, and meditation.”

-Thich Nhat Hanh<sup>70</sup>

If mindfulness is present already in Christian practice and doctrine, and it has been shown to be an effective therapeutic tool in clinical psychology, its benefits ought to be adapted into the pastoral care relationship. Pastoral care is the practice of church leadership and pastors in guiding their congregations. It refers to care that has a pastoral sense specifically because of the Jewish-Christian ideas of God shepherding the People of God, and the Christian idea of Jesus as the ‘good shepherd’ over his people. The specific care piece of the pastoral role involves listening, storytelling, and guiding care seekers toward meaning.<sup>71</sup> Pastoral care differs from all types of spiritual care in that spiritual care encompasses all religious backgrounds and contexts and pastoral care refers only to Jewish-Christian contexts where the image of shepherding is present.<sup>72</sup> From a spiritual level, pastoral care is the keeping and care of the soul of congregants.

The goal of Pastoral Care is spiritual growth and the introduction and processing of life in a spiritual context with a trusted professional and mentor in the faith. Rabbi Rami Shapiro

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<sup>70</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York, NY: Riverhead, 1997), 112

<sup>71</sup> Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: a Postmodern Approach*. Revised and Expanded. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015).

<sup>72</sup> Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: a Postmodern Approach*. Xxii.

defines spiritual growth as “an ever-deepening capacity to embrace life with justice, compassion, curiosity, awe, wonder, serenity, and humility.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, the more we grow spiritually, the more we see God as the substance of all things. The goal in a shepherding and mentoring relationship like that of pastoral care is to further this development. Seeing God in all things is the way that Christians ought to live in the presence of God every day, and the connecting point between mindfulness and the pastoral care relationship seems to be a key way of fostering that growth.

### **Differentiating Pastoral Care from Clinical Psychology**

The pastoral care relationship differs from that of the clinical psychology relationship firstly because of the other roles and tasks of the pastor. Caring for the congregation is an overarching goal of a pastor, but often intellectual care by way of preaching, or organizational care by way of making sure that the church body is meeting regularly are prioritized. This is not to say that specific pastoral care meetings should not be the primary focus of the pastor, but to emphasize the other responsibilities the pastor holds within the realm of care of the congregation.

Secondly, the pastoral care relationship is often far more informal than that of the relationship present in clinical psychology, as the pastor generally sees the individual often and in a variety of settings whereas the clinical psychologist has a formal practitioner-client relationship and only sees them at appointed times. A pastoral care title often does not require the licensing process as a psychotherapist does and can often be a helpful asset to those who are or are not currently in psychotherapy alike. Clinical Pastoral Therapist exists as a title, and they are licensed as mental health counselors, however these individuals are seldom those who are working in a distinct church or ministry setting.

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<sup>73</sup> Rami M. Shapiro, *Recovery-the Sacred Art: The Twelve Steps as Spiritual Practice* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Pub., 2016), xiii.

Thirdly, these relationships differ because of the goals of and within the relationship. In pastoral care, the goal is to listen to the stories of care seekers and make meaning together out of those stories.<sup>74</sup> While Narrative Therapy is a treatment modality within clinical psychology utilizing the life stories of clients for the aim of reauthoring and rewriting the narratives surrounding the predicament of the client,<sup>75</sup> the goal of the clinical psychologist is to offer assistance in relieving maladjustment utilizing specific treatment interventions. Clinical psychology involves and emphasizes an empirical component and scientific understanding in the implementation of care, whereas pastoral care utilizes the understanding of religion as it applies to how the soul can be healed.

### **Why Pastoral Care?**

Aloysius Pieris SJ, a Sri Lankan Jesuit priest describes Mindfulness experientially as “primarily an art of becoming wholesome and fully human rather than a mere technique for acquisition of psychic powers or a philosophical tool for analyzing the mind.”<sup>76</sup> He claims this is the best manner for Christians to reference mindfulness. This definition is particularly important and informative to the field of pastoral care, as it emphasizes how mindfulness can be used to promote becoming more truly and fully human. Framed in this manner, mindfulness emphasizes the shalom wholeness of purpose for the pastoral care relationship.

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<sup>74</sup> Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: a Postmodern Approach*. Revised and Expanded. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015).

<sup>75</sup> M. Seo et al., “Narrative Therapy with an Emotional Approach for People with Depression: Improved Symptom and Cognitive-Emotional Outcomes,” *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 22, no. 6 (September 2015): pp. 379-389, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpm.12200>.

<sup>76</sup> Aloysius SJ Pieris, "Spirituality as Mindfulness: Biblical and Buddhist Approaches." *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 10, no. 1 (2010): 38-51. doi:10.1353/scs.0.0082.

It is known that spirituality is a necessary component for resilience, and that tapping into faith is something that is incredibly encouraging in times of crisis and helps to breed resilience. Brene Brown, a prominent researcher on emotions states that “feelings of hopelessness, fear, blame, pain, discomfort, vulnerability, and disconnection sabotage resilience. The only experience that seems broad and fierce enough to combat a list like that is the belief that we’re all in this together and that something greater than us has the capacity to bring love and compassion into our lives.”<sup>77</sup> Some of the tenets of mindfulness include loving kindness and compassion, and form these in practitioners by way of the acknowledgement that this life is fleeting, suffering is a natural process of life, and that all things are interconnected. Pastoral care operates in the realm of resilience building and meaning making, and thus the incorporation of practices that remind individuals that all things are interconnected with the basis of faith seems like a natural process.

Also, taking care of the self in a uniquely religious and spiritual way offers a special kind of healing, and is an important way of connecting with God in an even deeper and more true way. Mindfulness is a tool that can be used to connect the mind, body, and spirit in a religious way in a care-oriented relationship like pastoral care. Thich Nhat Hanh states that: “to take good care of yourself and to take good care of living beings and of the environment is the best way to love God. This love is possible when there is the understanding that you are not separate from other beings or the environment. This understanding cannot be merely intellectual. It must be experiential, the insight gained by deep touching and deep looking in a daily life of prayer, contemplation, and meditation.”<sup>78</sup> This mind-body-spirit connection is something that is clearly

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<sup>77</sup> Brene Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You Are Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Minneapolis, MN: Hazelden, 2010). 73.

<sup>78</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York, NY: Riverhead, 1997), 112

in the heart of God, and learning to enter into this connection, view it nonjudgmentally, and do so in a caring relationship may be integral to the healing of individuals in the Church.

Harnessing this mind-body-spirit connection in a uniquely Christian way goes far beyond just sitting in meditation. It involves the deep understanding of resting in Christ, the active nature of the love of God towards oneself and others, and the active practice of community.

Participating in the practice of looking deeply in community ought to be an integral task of the church.<sup>79</sup> Mindfulness practices when brought into the church will help the whole community to foster the way of Christ. Thich Nhat Hanh suggests that “Christians who pray to God also have to learn deeply Christ’s art of living if they want to enter His teachings.”<sup>80</sup> Mindfulness is a proposed key manner of doing this, as the way of Jesus often looked unhurried and involved seeking solitude and participating in silence and conversation with God.

### **Settings for Implementation**

Within Church settings of pastoral care, mindfulness can be implemented both communally and individually. In places where the speaking and preaching pastor at the pulpit is the same individual who does the vast majority of the work in the care ministry of the church, this takes little coordination. In churches where these roles are split and shared between many pastoral individuals, coordination becomes more difficult. However, in both scenarios, mindfulness is easily implemented. It can be as easy as the speaking pastor taking an extra second and encouraging the congregation towards taking a breath together before they pray or begin the service, or it can be programming during individual one on one settings, curriculum for small groups, or whole congregation events such as prayer evenings.

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<sup>79</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York, NY: Riverhead, 1997).

<sup>80</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 126.

The individual, one-on-one context is the most often considered setting in the conceptualization of what pastoral care looks like. This presents a prime opportunity for mindfulness to be implemented, as the caregiver can offer guidance and teach practices that may be uniquely tailored to the care seeker. Mindfulness strategies can help both individuals as they create meaning out of the stories of the life of the care seeker. Both will ideally deepen in their understanding of God at work in the world and in themselves, find space between a situation and the response to that situation, and come away with more compassion and empathy for the relationship, ultimately leading to more healing.

In the average small group setting, it is practical and feasible to take time out of weekly meetings for silent prayer and meditation and encourage the tenets of mindfulness within that time. Mindfulness ideas within the Bible should also emerge through study naturally and offer opportunities for contemplation. This setting is a prime way for mindfulness to be implemented by many spiritual leaders in a manner that promotes storytelling and meaning making as key components of pastoral care. Mindfulness in this setting will serve groups to be more compassionate and empathetic, allowing for more space for the stories of every individual. Additionally, the Church may offer specific small groups tailored towards groups in need of particular care or who are all facing the same life predicament, such as grief or addiction. These specialized small group settings are a prime opportunity for mindfulness to be practiced and taught.

As pastors are present in almost every Christian institution, from specific organizational ministries to universities, the implementation of mindfulness in settings where pastors and Christian leaders are offering care are ubiquitous. Given that the language and concepts of mindfulness are so intertwined with both Christian ideas and psychology, it is a feasible task for

mindfulness to be specifically implemented within the pastoral care setting. This implementation will have positive implications for both the care seekers and the caregiver within the pastoral care relationship, leading only to the increased flourishing of the Church.

## Chapter Five: Mindfulness for the Care-seeker

“Inside of silence - especially extended silence - we see that things find their true order and meaning somewhat naturally.”

-Richard Rohr<sup>81</sup>

The clearest implementation of these ideas within the realm of the pastoral care relationship is for the care-seeker. Mindfulness is particularly important in the grounding process as one grows and processes their lived experiences, and as guided by the caregiver in the pastoral care relationship this can be a very impactful tool. Mindfulness allows the individual to find peace with the innermost parts of themselves and with the world. Thich Nhat Hanh describes the importance of this well in his *Living Buddha Living Christ* as follows:

Our capacity to make peace with another person and with the world depends very much on our capacity to make peace with ourselves. If we are at war with our parents, our family, our society, or our church, there is probably a war going on inside us also, so the most basic work for peace is to return to ourselves and create harmony among the elements within us - our feelings, our perceptions, and our mental states. That is why the practice of meditation, looking deeply, is so important. We must recognize and accept the conflicting elements that are within us and their underlying causes. It takes time, but the effort always bears fruit. When we have peace within, real dialogue with others is possible.<sup>82</sup>

This looking deeply can have an incredible impact in the meaning making process within pastoral care. It allows for the space between the situation and the person’s reaction towards their environment in response, allowing them to engage with the world and bring their most full self to life more healthily. Mindfulness for the care-seeker would allow them to reap the benefits of mindfulness in the care of a mentor caregiver who is guiding them through the process. When mindfulness is incorporated into this trust-oriented relationship of care for the purpose of making

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<sup>81</sup> Richard Rohr, *Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2014), 20.

<sup>82</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York, NY: Riverhead, 1997), 10.

meaning out of the narratives of one's life, the hope is that the process will be even more effective.

While mindfulness is perhaps easiest to incorporate in a one-on-one setting between the caregiver and the care-seeker, it is also approachable to implement in the pastoral care of families and small groups and can be especially beneficial in group settings. Mindfulness in groups of conflict commonly characteristic of families seeking pastoral care can help encourage individuals towards loving-kindness to others, nonjudgement, and a healthy detachment to suffering. Mindfulness in family care offers space for each individual to fully be themselves and to come to a fuller recognition and acceptance of their circumstances, which will allow the storytelling, meaning making, and conflict resolution processes of pastoral care much more beneficial.

Mindfulness in specific care groups can be extremely cathartic in the simple aspect of being with others. Mindfulness practice when practiced in the presence of others creates a security and sameness of those in the group leading to a deeper understanding and acceptance of the shared circumstances and the individual differences present in the group. Common pastoral care ministries for specific groups already present in many Church settings include support for those processing parenting, grief, cancer diagnoses and treatment, addiction, job loss, and more. As these groups of care are already formed, mindfulness can transform the space into an even more supportive environment of acceptance and care.

The pastoral care giver can implement the ideas of mindfulness in their care of the congregation both implicitly and explicitly. Implicitly this may look like using the language and practices of mindfulness but not naming it as such, whereas explicitly this looks like the caregiver teaching and guiding the care seeker through specific practices. Some implicit

opportunities for implementation include the encouragement the caregiver can offer to the care seeker. The care seeker can be encouraged in a nonattachment and nonjudgmental disposition towards the emotions and circumstances of one's life and by being reminded to be with themselves gently in their circumstances and suffering. The caregiver can also implicitly include small moments of mindfulness practice by incorporating moments of silence, encouraging deep breaths, and modeling mindfulness and stillness for the care seeker.

### **Possible Influential Practices**

There are many opportune examples of practices for the care seeker within the pastoral care relationship to practice mindfulness explicitly. The following are feasible practices for a caregiver to teach and guide the care seeker through that are simple mindfulness building practices. Once taught, the hope is that these practices will be utilized throughout the common life of the care seeker as well as in the context of the pastoral care relationship. The goal of each of these practices is to increase both the state mindfulness of the care seeker in the moment of their suffering or in the time of meaning making, and to increase the overall mindfulness of the care seeker that they might reap the benefits of mindfulness in their lives.

There are a variety of easily teachable and accessible mindfulness practices for the care seeker to interact with. These include simple breathing exercises like box breathing. The process of box breathing where one inhales, pauses, and exhales and makes each of those parts of the breath take the same duration of time. A practice could be even simpler, with the focus of the breath in the abdomen, or with the attention drawn to the tip of the nose where air enters and exits. The focus on the breath is the first step and the central core of the vast majority of common mindfulness practices, and so it can be an easily accessible tool for the care seeker.

Practices like the body scan or progressive muscle relaxation can also be beneficial for the care seeker, as they move attention from just the breath into the whole body. Each of these practices draws attention to each specific region of the body to attempt to find and release tension. This allows for the care seeker to enter more deeply into their body and back into themselves as they process the narratives that are forming in their lives.

Additionally, the following practices are Christian practices, founded in the contemplative stream of Christianity that have unique connections to the typical understanding of mindfulness. Though not mindfulness based in specific language, they hold and grow in the person who practices them many of the principles and values of mindfulness. Thus, when thought of as mindfulness practices that are uniquely Christian, the opportunity for the richness of the benefits of mindfulness emerge for the individual practicing these.

#### Examen

The process and practice of examen has been created and made a widespread practice through the Jesuit order. Many words are used to describe the five steps of examen as it has been spread and passed down. Especially as this process is unique to everyone who practices it and the life scenarios, they find themselves in, it has been described in a multitude of ways. Yet, the meaning and core remains. First is the step of gratitude, where one is encouraged to savor and find thankfulness in their lives. The second step is grace. It humbles and calls the individual to as and notice where one has failed to respond to God's invitation throughout the day. The third step is review and involves a reflection on the events of the day, with an active attention to the thoughts, words, and deeds of the day. The fourth step is forgiveness and asking pardon of God. Finally, the fifth step is the resolution and resolve to amend, asking grace for the next day.

Overall, this practice is for the goal of helping individuals notice how God seems to work mostly gradually, and that God often works in patterns of activity.<sup>83</sup> Within pastoral care, this process can help individuals as they process through their emotional states or times of distress and allows them to note God at work through each aspect of their life.

### Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is the practice of sacred text reading and emphasizes reflective listening. It involves the repetition of a certain passage of scripture so that the meaning of the words become more fully understood and felt. First, one reads the scripture aloud, then they consider if a particular phrase or word stood out. Then, the scripture is read again, and things that stick out are noted again. Then, there is opportunity for dialogue with God in response.<sup>84</sup> This process is often summed up as reading, meditating, praying, and then contemplating. This can be especially beneficial as a practice within Pastoral Care if there is a verse or phrase within a piece of scripture that speaks to the common thread within one's story or is a lie of the world that one can actively combat with scriptural truth. Additionally, this practice can be easily adapted for a group practice as well as being approachable for the individual.

### Centering Prayer

The phrasing of centering prayer is a good explanation for the process. Centering prayer is a method of prayer in silence, very similar to seated mindfulness meditation. However, once one centers themselves on the breath, a sacred word or short phrase is repeated. Often this phrase is a name or attribute of God. One can choose a specific word and stick to it or choose one that

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<sup>83</sup> James Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2012).

<sup>84</sup> Douglas J Leonhardt, "Praying with Scripture - Lectio Divina & Gospel Contemplation," Ignatian Spirituality (Loyola Press, June 11, 2020), <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-what-how-why-of-prayer/praying-with-scripture/>.

feels more relevant to their experience in the moment. Centering Prayer has even been termed a “Christian-sensitive alternative to Buddhist-informed mindfulness meditation,”<sup>85</sup> displaying its similarity to the meditative practices of Eastern traditions.

Overall, each of these practices brings the care seeker closer to silence and stillness. There are many more examples of beneficial practices to point to, but these are fantastic opportunities to begin with. Within each practice, the care seeker will be brought into a deeper silence, which is where the often unnoticed work of God comes to light. Richard Rohr in *Silent Compassion* states that “inside of silence - especially extended silence - we see that things find their true order and meaning somewhat naturally.”<sup>86</sup> It seems as though in the silence, tensions and paradoxes are held together more easily, and the stories of one’s life have more meaning and less chaos than what initially appears. For the care seeker in distress or in the attempt to make sense of life, this is a critical opportunity to make space for God to appear in the silence.

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<sup>85</sup> Joshua J. Knabb et. al. “Christian Meditation for Repetitive Negative Thinking: A Multisite Randomized Trial Examining the Effects of a 4-Week Preventative Program.” *Spirituality in Clinical Practice (Washington, D.C.)* 7, no. 1 (2020): 34–50. doi:10.1037/scp0000206.

<sup>86</sup> Richard Rohr, *Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2014), 20.

## Chapter Six: Mindfulness for the Caregiver

“It is because of the practice of meditation- stopping, calming, and looking deeply - that I have been able to nourish and protect the sources of my spiritual energy and continue this work.”

-Thich Nhat Hanh<sup>87</sup>

It is well known that pastors are commonly overworked, take on great responsibility for the life and health of the congregation, and are prone to burnout. Thus, the spiritual practices of the caregiver are integral to the healthy pastoral care relationship, which will lead to the utmost and ideal level of care of the congregation. A healthy pastor is a key component to the health of the congregation in all the leadership roles of the pastor, and especially so in the context of specific pastoral care ministry. As mindfulness is an easily integrated component to the spiritual life of Christians, pastors ought to use it as a focus for their own spiritual formation and development.

Thich Nhat Hanh touches on this through the telling of his personal experiences and suggestions in his book *Living Buddha Living Christ*. He claims that “it is because of the practice of meditation- stopping, calming, and looking deeply - that I have been able to nourish and protect the sources of my spiritual energy and continue this work.”<sup>88</sup> The time he has personally spent nourishing the spiritual practices in his life has been integral in his sustaining energy for the work. He claims that “through the practice of deep looking and deep listening, we become free, able to see the beauty and values in our own and others’ tradition.”<sup>89</sup> He continues, stating

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<sup>87</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York, NY: Riverhead, 1997), 3.

<sup>88</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 3.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

that “when we are mindful, touching deeply the present moment, we can see and listen deeply, and the fruits are always understanding, acceptance, love, and the desire to relieve suffering and bring joy,”<sup>90</sup> and that “if we can learn ways to touch the peace, joy, and happiness that are already there, we will become healthy and strong, and a resource for others.”<sup>91</sup> For the pastoral caregiver the ability to see the tradition and lens through which another views their world is absolutely necessary. As mindfulness is a proposed way of increasing this capability, it should not be written off or passed by as a focus of the pastor in their care of the congregation.

### **The Mindful Pastoral Caregiver**

As there is a movement for mindfulness informed therapy in the field of clinical psychology, it is imperative that there is the acknowledgement of mindfulness informed pastoral care. As the mindful therapist is integral, so is the mindful pastoral caregiver. A healthy, mindful pastoral caregiver is one who can hold space for another nonjudgmentally and with a healthy separation of their own experience from that of those they seek to care for. On a moment-to-moment basis, they can find the space between their reaction to circumstances and their intentional response in a thoughtful manner. The space that mindfulness offers to produce a thoughtful response rather than a quick unprocessed reaction allows space for processing of the care seeker to emerge in the context of the care of the caregiver. It also allows for the voice of God and the work of the Holy Spirit to emerge within the pastoral care relationship, and releases the pressure that the pastoral caregiver must somehow take the place and bear the responsibility that in actuality is the role of God.

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<sup>90</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York, NY: Riverhead, 1997), 14.

<sup>91</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 19.

## **Mindfulness Practice for the Caregiver**

A variety of practices will be beneficial for the caregiver in the pastoral care relationship. The practices suggested for the care seeker are also very applicable to the life of the caregiver, as they seek to be a mindful shepherd of others through the process of reflection on the narratives of their lives. Additionally, specific practices that are created to increase the compassion or the loving-kindness in oneself for the world will be beneficial to the empathy of the caregiver as they interact with the care seeker. Overall, the hope is that as the caregiver grows in their trait mindfulness through practice, they would also be more easily able to enter states of mindfulness as they practice.

Many of the practices above for the care seeker can be practiced in a quick moment, or in as long as one desires to practice. This flexibility makes these practices easily approachable for the caregiver to practice in their daily lives, or even in a meeting in the silent moments of conversation or between meetings. It is particularly important for the caregiver in their mindfulness practice is the continual centering of themselves in real time. The hope is that the recurring and continual mindfulness practice of the caregiver will lead to a higher level of trait mindfulness, shown to be correlated with positive outcomes for the caregiver, and ultimately for their ministry. Using the mindful return to the breath, the center of being and the place where one's inner silence meets that of the divine, the caregiver can become more aware of the divine in the care seeker and in all people. They then will be more able to bring to awareness the stories the care seeker presents and center those in the moment rather than the personal thoughts and experience of the caregiver.

This centering can also be done with things like the Jesus prayer, a particular phrase that is important to the caregiver and reminds them of the presence of God such as 'take heart' or 'be

still,' a counted number of seconds, or just in one breath. Even small moments of breath awareness and centering allow for greater awareness of oneself in the balance of the care of the other, which ultimately leads to the understanding of the presence of God in every aspect of the moment. This is where the current prayer life of the caregiver can easily coincide with the understanding of the principles of mindfulness, to bring to fullness the work of the mindful pastoral caregiver. This ultimately will lead to better shepherding of the congregants, as there is more space for the lives, stories, and the active presence of God to be acknowledged in moments of care.

### Conclusions and Implications for Future Study

“Worship and joy start with the capacity to turn our minds’ attention toward the God who is always with us in the now.”

-John Mark Comer<sup>92</sup>

The rapprochement of mindfulness within Christian ministries of the West is integrally important as mindfulness continues to grow as a field and be utilized in the secular world as a tool for growth and the promotion of subjective well-being. If this rapprochement is not attempted, the conflicts surrounding Christians approaching and utilizing mindfulness will continue. In recent decades, the application of mindfulness in a variety of areas has exploded. The neuroscience research has followed, citing great benefits to the practice of and the trait of mindfulness. However, Christians remain hesitant in approaching mindfulness for fear of it being heretical in the negation of the roots of mindfulness within Eastern religious thought, or merely the appropriation of these ideas. When mindfulness concepts are approached from the basis of Christianity, the similarities between traditions emerge over the differences in belief. When a certain unique Christian mindfulness emerges from Christian tradition and thought, the practice of mindfulness for the Christian can be an influential part of their faith rather than an aversion from the faith tradition. Then when applied and utilized within the realm and relationship of pastoral care, mindfulness could become an influential and fundamental tool for the care of the congregation.

The criticisms of heresy and appropriation will continue to inform nuanced conversation surrounding the implementation and approach of mindfulness by Western Christians. Support

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<sup>92</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in Our Current Chaos*, 53.

will continue to be needed in these conversations by care seekers and caregivers alike within a variety of helping professions, especially in the prevention of dogmatic factionalism.<sup>93</sup> However, this is not to be shied away from given the benefits of mindfulness and the commonalities found within the Christian tradition and common mindfulness ideas.

Mindfulness can feasibly be implemented in a variety of Christian ministry and pastoral care contexts. As it has emerged in Biblical ideas and Christian practices, though not named as such, it is an applicable concept to discuss in many contexts. Specifically in pastoral care, it could be an extremely beneficial tool for the individual, family, or group. Additionally, mindfulness is particularly useful for the caregiver, and mindful pastoral caregivers will likely be far more successful in their efforts.

There is still much to be uncovered about mindfulness as a concept, how mindfulness impacts the brain and body, and how the implementation of mindfulness is effective in encouraging these benefits. Specifically, within Christian contexts there is very little research on the effectiveness of implementing mindfulness. A psychological study by Knabb and colleagues suggests that the use of Christian meditation such as Centering Prayer could be impactful as an preventative intervention for those involved in great amounts of repetitive negative thinking (RNT).<sup>94</sup> This suggests the potential use of Christian mindfulness as a preventative measure against emotional disorders, which could be significant in the goals of promoting a healthier church and healthier community, which is a major goal of pastoral care. Given the suggested

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<sup>93</sup> Veronica L. Timbers and Jennifer C. Hollenberger, “Christian Mindfulness and Mental Health: Coping through Sacred Traditions and Embodied Awareness,” *Religions* 13, no. 1 (October 2022): p. 62, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010062>.

<sup>94</sup> Joshua J. Knabb et. al. “Christian Meditation for Repetitive Negative Thinking: A Multisite Randomized Trial Examining the Effects of a 4-Week Preventative Program.” *Spirituality in Clinical Practice (Washington, D.C.)* 7, no. 1 (2020): 34–50. doi:10.1037/scp0000206.

application of centering prayer because of the known benefits of mindfulness meditation, the work of pastoral care can easily intersect with the field and the practice of mindfulness, and further research into the effectiveness of this implementation is possible.

With the burgeoning research into mindfulness and the promotion of implementing mindfulness in a variety of contexts, one wonders what a more mindful community would look like both within the Church and in society as a whole. John Mark Comer suggests that “the noise of the modern world makes us deaf to the voice of God, drowning out the one input we most need,”<sup>95</sup> but “worship and joy start with the capacity to turn our minds’ attention toward the God who is always with us in the now.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, the hope is, as Dan Harris from his own experience discusses, that more people would become even just ten percent happier.<sup>97</sup> If mindfulness does not completely transform the world, any push in the direction of wholeness, worship, awareness of God at work in the world, and happiness is worth pursuing and implementation is worth encouraging in more contexts. Thus the question of how we acquire and create a more mindful community may be answered by way of the implementation of mindfulness within pastoral care.

The hope is that those who harness the benefits and joys found in mindfulness, especially in Christian mindfulness, can then enter the world with the same transformative wholeness. As Thich Nhat Hanh suggests, “faith implies practice, living our daily life in mindfulness. Some people think prayer or meditation involves only our minds or our hearts. But we also have to

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<sup>95</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in Our Current Chaos* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2019), 122.

<sup>96</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in Our Current Chaos*, 53.

<sup>97</sup> Dan Harris, *10% Happier - How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works- a True Story*. 5th Anniversary ed. (Harper Collins, 2019).

pray with our bodies, with our actions in the world.”<sup>98</sup> When mindful, faithful people enter the world, the care seeker can then become the active caregiver and share the richness that mindfulness has furthered in their stories with the world. A more mindful world would combat the hurry sickness and dependency so present in the 21<sup>st</sup> century postmodern Western society as it furthers the Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth and promotes the shalom flourishing of all. Thus, mindfulness ought to be considered an effective conceptual tool for the pastoral care of Western Christians.

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<sup>98</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York, NY: Riverhead, 1997), 136.

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