

Integrating Body, Mind, and Soul: The Value and Practice of Integrating Christian Mindfulness in Social Work Practice

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Abstract and Goals of this Presentation

Social workers often work with marginalized populations in high stress environments. An overview of Christian mindfulness along with experiential practice will be provided. Christian mindfulness refreshes the body, mind, and soul of the Christian social worker, increasing our ability to make a difference in the lives of those we serve.



Objectives

After completing this training, participants will be able to **define Christian mindfulness** and distinguish this practice from secular and Buddhist models of mindfulness. • **Gain experiential knowledge of Christian mindfulness practices** and how to incorporate them in direct social work practice with individuals, family, and groups • **Understand the research-based outcomes of Christian mindfulness practice** and identify how to incorporate them into third-wave behavioral interventions. • **Advance your own self-care** practices through mindfulness



How I came to practice mindfulness

- Past: LCSW history and clients
 - New faculty member at APU; new PhD student, two kids 8 & 6 years old, husband traveled for work
- Devotion, sacred times with God
 - hearing His voice; constant redirection: who am I again, Lord? What am I about? Mindful about little decisions every day in His presence
- Also now, "brain bath", good therapy, resilience, clarity, focus

Mindfulness defined

Roots in secular and Buddhist thought

[Jon Kabat-Zinn](#): His words





Mindfulness defined in SW practice

Mindfulness, as often defined in the practice and research literature is the practice of paying attention to the present moment without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).



Buddhism

The Four Noble Truths:

All life is suffering—”dhukka”

- Suffering is caused by our cravings in life; the truth is that there is impermanence in life
- Detachment to cravings and seeing that we are one will end suffering
- The path of cessation of attachment which is the Eightfold path -Right mindfulness



Christian mindfulness

Christian contemplative and spiritual direction practices as congruent with mindfulness in clinical and research literature. (Fox, Gutierrez, Haas, & Durnford, 2016; Knabb, 2012; Trammel, 2017)

As Christians, this present-moment orientation allows for the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of need within the social work practitioner where God can refresh and heal. (Rosales & Tan, 2016)



Mindfulness principles and practices overview

The importance of integrated view of self: body, mind, Spirit.

Embodiment and Spirit-filled

[1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#) Biblegateway.com

Do you not know that your bodies **are temples** of the Holy Spirit, who **is** in you, whom you have received from God? You **are** not your own; you were bought **at a** price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Breath as foundation

Breath as the foundation :

https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?quicksearch=breath&qv_version=NIV

Importance of breath: parasympathetic system, we can measure effects of how this system is activated in heart rate variability--more on this and results of a study using HRV later

Exercise together: 4-count breath exercise with Christian Imagination



Christian Mindfulness

Therefore, one solid difference between secular versus Christian mindfulness is **relational aspect of the divine with practitioner.**

Communal readings, such as the *Lectio Divina*-can be clearly social acts, and contains a relational dimension (Nyunt, 2016)

Clear dichotomy between individualistic practice of Western, secular, traditional mindfulness, and Eastern, religious mindfulness coming out of communal contexts in



Christian Mindfulness

Christian mindfulness, in its spiritual practices, draws from such contemplative and mystical traditions both in Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

- The Jesus Prayer, Centering Prayer and *Lectio Divina* are such examples (Fox, Gutierrez, Haas, & Durnford, 2016; Frederick, Dunbar, & Thai, 2018; Frederick & White, 2015; Howard, 2012; Nyunt, 2015).
- Some of these practices itself are also considered to be Eastern (Orthodox traditions) and Western (Catholic traditions) and are therefore a good bridge between Western cultures and Eastern religious traditions. Those who practice these Christian spiritual practices also reflect similar processes, practices, and experiences as those who practice Buddhist mindfulness and meditation (Nilsson & Kazemi, 2016; Nyunt, 2015).



Christian Mindfulness

- Relational nature of a Christian mindfulness between practitioner and God, which is more reflective of Buddhist *sati*, than a secular emphasis in mindfulness practice, which more individualistic in nature.
- Sati-right mindfulness; against the dharma. In relationship with the dharma, with the sangha, and with others in mind-not individualistic in nature
- **Christian mindfulness-in relationship with God; God's presence, the active living Word, the activity of the Holy Spirit. Mindfulness to be aware –even closer than secular mindfulness**



We are Embodied

- [Matthew 22:37](#)

Jesus replied: “ Love the Lord your God with all **your** heart and with all **your** soul and with all **your** mind.



Mindfulness & the body

[Romans 8:10](#)

But if Christ is in you, then even though your **body** is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.



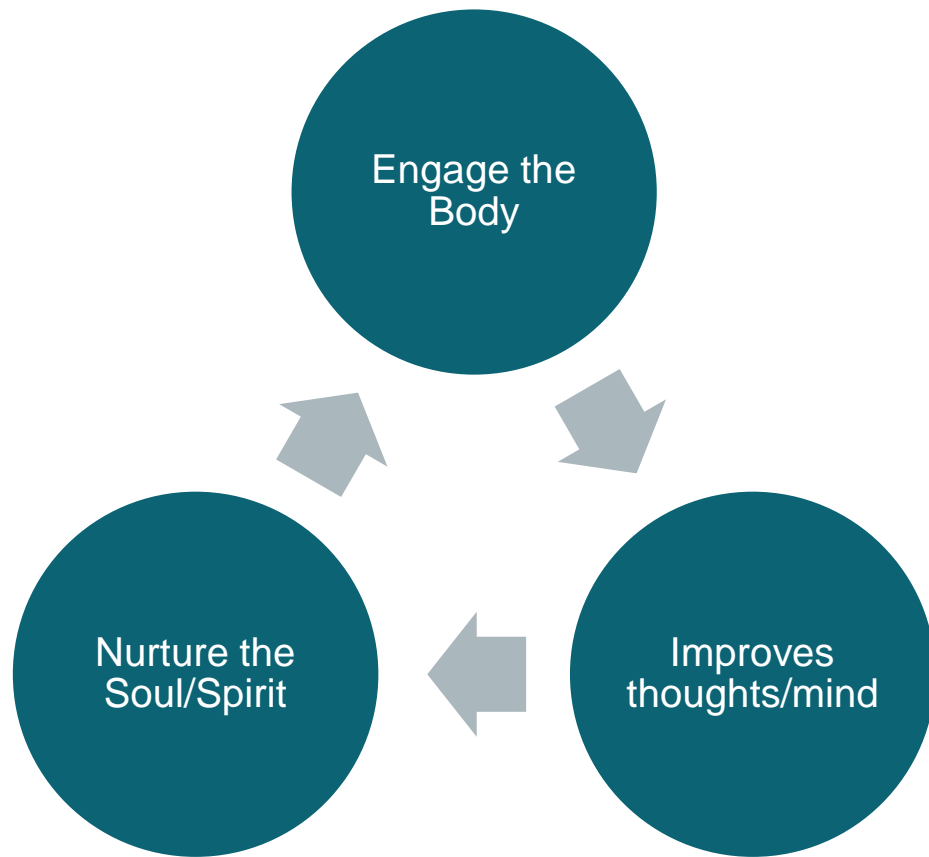
Body

Body: How stress affects the social worker

Body: How the body is used in mindfulness to bring awareness to other parts.

Stress management through mindful awareness—paying attention to the body.

Concepts wellness prevention, resilience, and empathy (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Shonin, Gordon, & Griffiths, 2014). • Christian meditation addresses self-care and supports compassionate response (Dombo & Gray, 2013).





Body

How using mindfulness can help us be more aware of bodies.

- Trauma as stored in body; and awareness of trauma is mitigated when our bodies can be used to work on the trauma.

Parallels to clinical intervention in eating disorders, self-injury, and trauma using mindfulness.



Stress and the body

- Frederick, Dunbar & Thai (2018) specify the Christian practices of the Eastern Orthodox *Jesus Prayer*, the Jesuit practices of *the examen*, and prayers of consideration as concepts of mindfulness in the Christian tradition to possibly alleviate burnout amongst pastoral staff.
- The Jesus Prayer: Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner

Mindfulness and the mind

[Isaiah 55:8](#)

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither **are your** ways **my** ways,”
declares the LORD.





CBT & Christian Mindfulness

- Distorted versus Reframed thoughts
- Taking every thought captive-thoughts and observing thoughts
- Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy
- CBT requires us to lead our clients to look at thoughts. From Albert Ellis' Rational Emotive Therapy approach and contemporaries like David Burns, we begin by breaking down clients' thoughts: If ____ then; Or Antecedent, Belief, Consequence, or we may map out thoughts and match them to corresponding distortions.
- Christian mindfulness allows us to test these thoughts against Scripture and/or against the leadings of the Holy Spirit.
 - Tan (2007) begins client case with mindfulness activity; may bring up a trauma and use inner healing prayer as a visually & cognitively based reframe. Also, use Scripture to challenge thoughts but not dismiss issues of suffering that CBT may try to avoid. Or sin.



Mind

- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, and integrating Christian mindfulness into this modality. (Wang & Tan, 2016) • Body scan exercise (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).
- Wise, sound mind and the dialectic in DBT
- Opposites at work. (Wang & Tan, 2016).
- Wang & Tan discuss the doctrines of justification & sanctification as a paradoxical posture of how God declares us righteous even as we are still sinners, Romans 5:8, (p. 72).
- Mindfulness practice can be used to help clients understand this paradoxical truth and find acceptance in God.



Mind

- The Lord's prayer *Lectio Divina* exercise



Christian mindfulness infused DBT

Faith does not just equal thoughts and beliefs

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,

but fools^[a] despise wisdom and instruction. Proverbs 1:7 NIV-biblegateway.com

Matthew 14:22-33 New International Version (NIV)

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."



Mind

Non-judgment-Tea Drinking Exercise

- Mindfulness and non-judgment a key aspect.
- We can thoughtfully make space for the Holy Spirit to move and hear His voice, clarify through Scripture
- Perhaps this can bring up issues of sin; perhaps it can bring forgiveness of sin.
- Can be difficult for Christians (Wang & Tan, 2016)



Mindfulness and the Soul

Matthew 16:26

What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their **soul**? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their **soul**?





Soul

- Mindfulness allows the Holy Spirit to work and move.
- Faith is engaged when we can seek God's wisdom and forgiveness
- Prayer, letting go, forgiveness, ethical decision-making, and practicing selfcare via mindfulness. (Grant, 2014; Hanley, Warner, & Garland, 2015)



Soul

- How mindfulness can facilitate forgiveness (Jeter & Brannon, 2017; Johns, Allen, & Gordon, 2015; Webb, Phillips, Bumgarner, & Conway-Williams, 2013)
- Mindfulness plays a role in the process of forgiveness
- *Jesus prayer*. Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner



Soul

Christian mindfulness as self-care and burn-out prevention
(Acker, 2012; Taylor & Millear, 2016)

Christian mindfulness and ethical decision making (Trammel, 2015)

- Centering Prayer exercise



Soul

- We engage with what is real, what is of God, what is His value system over what our vision is for our ourselves, our work, our families, our organizations, our students, etc.
- And, He is a generous God; we can lead our clients out of scarcity thinking, we can lead our client out of past traumas and seek God's peace
- [Matthew 11:29](#)
- Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your **souls**



Soul

- **Treasure box exercise**

Healing from trauma; combining Christian imagery with guided visualization techniques. Can be used in conjunction with a MBCT model

Exposure but not exposed; contained in a healing space with Christ at the center

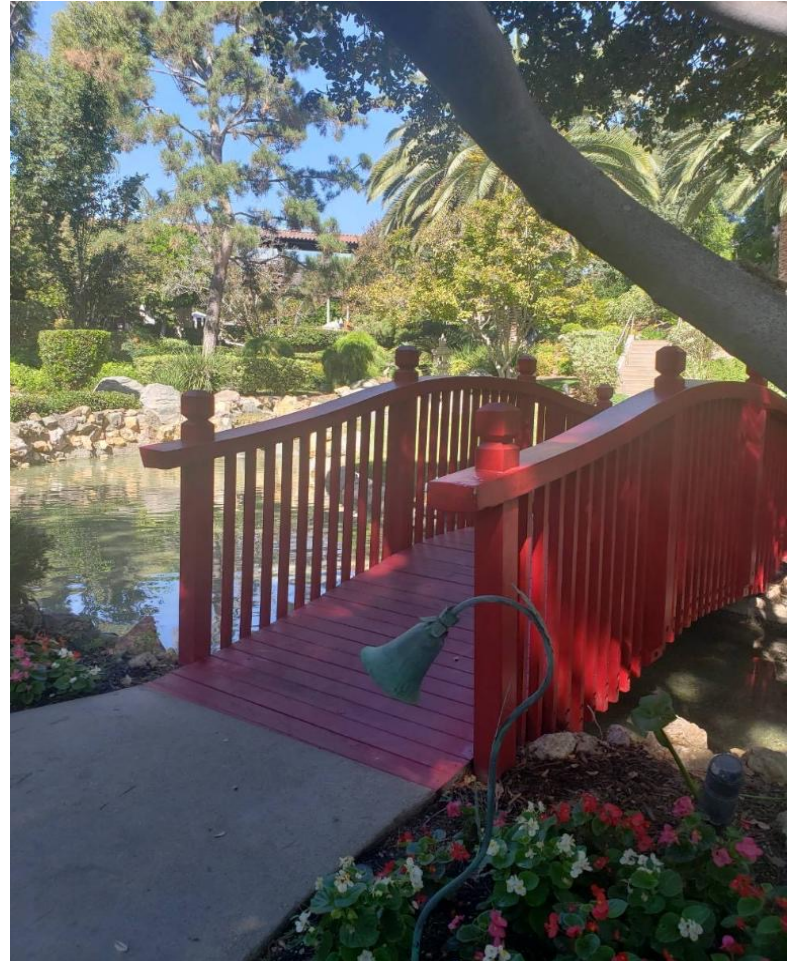
Christian mindfulness in trauma

- Before Inner healing prayer work in therapy (Tan, 1992)
- Christian mindfulness to reveal work to be done, promote starting where the client is at, evaluate readiness toward forgiveness and/or promote caution regarding cheap grace
- Can evaluate “messages or judgments heard”” versus Christ’s gentle yoke



Soul

- **Community Practice:** Christian mindfulness upholds imago dei – God's image
- We see people for who we truly are in Christian Mindfulness





Soul

The benefits of mindfulness in leadership (Buller, 2014; Pater, 2014; Raney, 2014). The “practical” side of mindfulness allows for:

- Presence-communication
- Passion-engagement
- Purpose-missional

Perspective taking and mindfulness--attunement (Nelson, Laurent, Bernstein, & Laurent, 2017)

- Macro Social Work-community asset building, resilience in activism, respite, & re-grouping





Some recent research on Christian mindfulness

- Trammel, Park & Karlsson
- Heart Rate Variability before and after a 4-6 week Christian mindfulness intervention for SW
- And a book project to come, so stay tuned and stay mindful! 😊



Questions, comments, open discussion