

WEEK THREE • DAY ONE

NUMBING OUT

“SQUIRREL!”

WEEKEND!

KAYLEA M. HUTSON-MILLER

fewer likes, 20 more delight

Remember Dug, the hyperactive yet loving dog from the movie *Up*? Dug is easily distracted. Often in mid-sentence, he shouts, “Squirrel!”—and then pings off to chase another idea or animal.

My husband and friends like to joke that I’m a bit like Dug. They say I ping from thought to thought so fast that I can cover a dozen ideas in less than a minute. I’ve found that my work as a journalist—with its constant stream of information from phone calls, texts, emails, and social media—makes me more apt to be distracted. I have a hard time putting down my phone. I can’t unplug even to eat a meal or watch a movie.

24 JULY>AUGUST 2019

july 15–21

WEEK THREE • DAY ONE

NUMBING OUT

“SQUIRREL!”

WEEKEND!

Technology should make my life easier. Instead, its distractions leave me feeling drained. My brain never shuts off, which leads to a lot of sleepless nights, and my health takes a dive. These distractions also damage my relationships with my husband, family, and friends. Rather than living in the moment, I find myself checking my phone in their presence to see what I might be missing.

Being plugged in 24/7 also affects my relationship with God. When I am distracted, I can miss what God might be trying to tell me. Like a plant that shrivels without water, my soul becomes dry and lifeless. I miss so many real-time opportunities because I have overloaded my brain with what I see, hear, and read on social media.

making a change

Each year I choose one word to shape and guide my life. This year I picked *delight*; I wanted to focus on taking delight in God’s world. For me, finding delight means unplugging from distractions and focusing on things that feed my soul. It means spending less time scrolling through social media and more time with my nose buried in a book. It means turning off the phone and learning a new technique in an art class. It means less pinging and more breathing. It means less screen time and more time with my friends and family.

I’ve learned that in order to become my best self, I need to focus less on the world and more on God. I’m not perfect. I still get distracted. But this year I want to focus more on delight—the things that encourage me, give me strength, and feed my spirit. I would rather end the year with fewer “likes” on social media and deeper, stronger relationships with my friends, family, and God. <

Kaylea M. Hutson-Miller is a journalist and creative soul who lives in Oklahoma—45 miles from a Starbucks. When she’s not juggling assignments, she’s home at her #Little FarmOnTheLake with her lawman husband and pets BatCat, Muzzy, and Opie.



21 NEXT DAY STRETCH

One way I have learned to find delight is by meditating on scripture. Every night I read the daily verse on YouVersion (a free Bible app) and write it down in a journal. Then I jot down my response—my related thoughts or an image that comes to mind. This practice focuses my attention and allows me to find delight in God’s word.

What one word might encourage you to stop pinging and start breathing? What practices might enable you to focus on feeding your soul, enriching your relationships, and finding delight in God’s word and world?

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JULY>AUGUST 2019 25

WEEK THREE • DAY TWO

NUMBING OUT

ON MY OWN

WEEKEND!

ANDREW BREEDEN

learning to be alone ²⁵

I spend a fair amount of time in the woods by myself. Whether I am sitting or walking, with or without a purpose, doesn't much matter as long as I am alone. I go to escape Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I go to get away from the ding of incoming text messages and emails and from my obligation to respond. I need to be alone, to see quietly to my thoughts and to let them move, unsettled, uncontained, and unresolved, until my mind finds a quiet and peaceful place, a place not easy to come by these days.

Perhaps without our noticing, the world has become noisy. I am of the opinion that technology is in part, if not entirely, to blame. A persistent deluge of communications, updates, posts, and reposts bombards us. We are constantly distracted.

Our minds never seem to be in the same location as our bodies, and our eyes see no farther than the screen in front of them. We seem incapable of thinking any thoughts beyond a status or a comment or a like, of having any experience

without the anxiety of containing it in a box of 140 characters, more or less, and then evaluating it by the comments and likes of others. Worst of all, we are increasingly afraid of being on our own—unconnected—because we have forgotten how to be alone.

58 SEPT-OCT 2014

october 20-26

WEEK THREE • DAY TWO

NUMBING OUT

ON MY OWN

WEEKEND!

Let us learn again. Let us become reacquainted with the pleasure of an experience that no one knows about, a thought unpublicized. Let us find moments to set aside our updates in order to be by ourselves. Of course, those of us unaccustomed to our own company and untrained in listening for our mind's voice may be intimidated by this practice of solitude. What's more, hearing and recognizing our inner voice is only half the battle. The other half is accepting what it has to say, becoming comfortable with our own thoughts and what our thoughts say to us and about us. We are likely to hear something we do not want to hear but need to know, which is all the more reason to spend time alone, listening.

Now, more than ever, we owe it to ourselves to spend some time alone, apart from our electronic devices. We need to let our

thoughts come and go as they please and to have ideas and experiences of our own, without the need to make them public or to have them commented upon. Our minds deserve a rest from the constant pressure of commenting, liking, filtering, posting, checking in, tweeting, and retweeting. We may have forgotten how to be alone, but it's

not too late for us to learn again. And learn we must, for if we have forgotten how to be alone, the next generation may never know how to begin. <

Andrew Garland Breeden is from Charlotte, Tennessee.

26 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Find time in the coming week to spend a few moments alone, away from others and away from technology. While you are alone, be attentive to your thoughts and feelings. What do you hear? What do you hear that you have not heard before?

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SEPT-OCT 2014 59

WEEK THREE • DAY THREE

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

RE-FOCUS

WEEKEND!

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!
1 John 3:1 (NIV)



25

Like a child

KEEP IT SIMPLE

The older I get
The more it seems
That I end up trying
To overcomplicate things

The black and the white
Are just muddled in gray
But there was a time
I didn't think this way

I long to go back
To the thinking I did
When I kept things simple
For I was a kid

Life's little annoyances
Didn't get in my hair
And I brought everything
To God in prayer

I now understand
Why Jesus decreed,
"Let the little children
Come to me."

I'm no longer young,
Carefree, or wild
But I can still learn
To think like a child. <

Jessica Lippe
[Central Point, Oregon]

58 JULY>AUGUST 2018

august 20-26

WEEK THREE • DAY THREE

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

RE-FOCUS

WEEKEND!



26

NEXT DAY STRETCH

LIVE IN THE MOMENT

Children laugh a lot, are easily entertained, and get excited about the simplest things. They have their problems and hurts, of course; but they are resilient. Children live in the moment. Do you want to be more like a child again?

- + **Rediscover the world around you.** Notice the things that form the backdrop of your days—the rays of morning sun streaming through your bedroom window, the buds on the tree you pass on your way to school, the white clouds against a cerulean sky, the spider web on the drain spout.
- + **Savor your food.** Don't just eat and run; slow down long enough to think about and enjoy your meal. When was the first time you had that dish? What foods do you like now that you didn't like as a child?
- + **Learn something.** Children don't have time to get into a rut because they are too busy discovering new things. Take up a new hobby or activity. Read a new author. Travel, if only vicariously with a travelogue.
- + **Reward yourself.** Set a goal for the week, and decide what your reward will be for reaching it. Anticipation is one of the best incentives and works at any age.
- + **Talk to a child.** If you want a fresh perspective, ask a child about almost anything. Wit, wisdom, imagination, hope, pathos—they have it all. Don't be surprised if you are revisited by some of your own childhood thoughts.
- + **Take downtime.** Your world won't come crashing down if you stop doing and accomplishing for a few minutes. Relax. Contemplate happy thoughts. Let your imagination run wild.
- + **Be thankful for small things.** A child can be delighted by an inexpensive gift, a chance to go outdoors, a bit of attention, or an empty swing at the park. Think of the little things you enjoy, and give thanks.

Nelson Nwosu [Abuja, Nigeria]

WEEK THREE • DAY FOUR

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

MAKING SPACE

Jesus wept. John 11:35 (NIV)

FEELING IT **25**

Alina Kanaski [Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania]

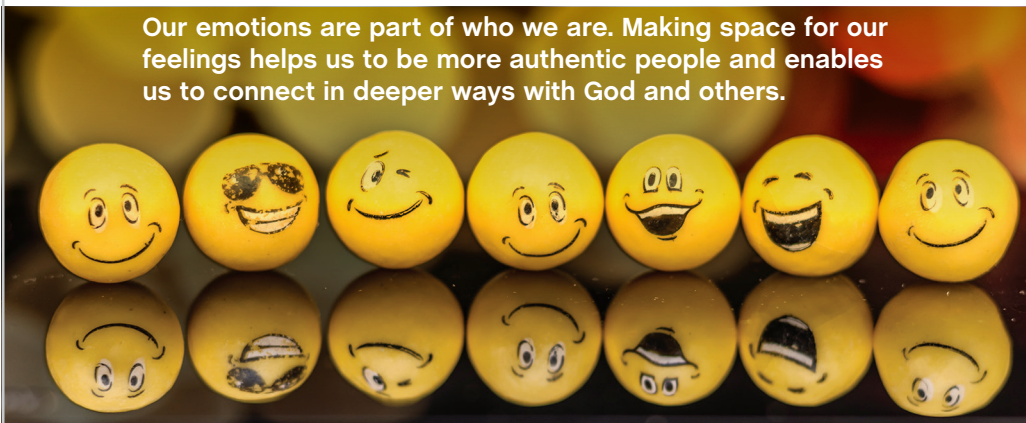
Emotions are complicated, and making space for them is important. Making space doesn't mean being driven by our emotions or assuming that it's always appropriate to act on them. It means being able to say, "This is what I'm feeling right now."

So what practices can help us make that space?

- + **Check in with your emotions**—journal, meditate, talk about them.
- + **Practice naming your emotions.** What does anger feel like to you? What about sadness? joy? If you're not sure, do some reading or talk with your friends.
- + **Pray through your emotions.** Need help? Find a psalm that expresses how you're feeling, and make it your prayer.
- + **Recognize how you usually respond to emotions.** Does sadness make you want to eat? Does anger make you want to hit something? Learn to notice your emotional triggers without acting on them.
- + **Think of next steps.** What is a healthy way to respond to your emotions? You can run to burn off anxious energy or write a letter to express your anger (even if you don't deliver it). <

remember:

Our emotions are part of who we are. Making space for our feelings helps us to be more authentic people and enables us to connect in deeper ways with God and others.



february 24–29

JANUARY>FEBRUARY 2020 **59**

WEEK THREE • DAY FIVE

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

I HATE MYSELF

God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them.
Genesis 1:27a (CEB)

SELFIE PROJECT

7

Katie Matson-Daley [St. Paul, Minnesota]

Like many young people, I have struggled with low self-esteem. By the end of 2014, I had gained a lot of weight and was far more preoccupied with what was wrong with me than with my value as a child of God. I had never liked being in photos; but the day after Christmas, I started a one-year "Selfie Project" as an exercise in courage and self-esteem. Each day, for 365 days, I took and posted one picture of myself.

Selfies are an easy target, and soon friends and family were making jokes. Yet every time I explained the project, I received more support than I expected.

Taking selfies taught me how to reflect on my own story and to see God's image in me. I still have days when I don't like the way I look, but I no longer feel that I have to wait until I lose weight or look better to do the things that matter to me.

My selfie project also made me more grateful. Being able to look at a year of daily pictures reminds me of all the people who have been part of my life. I see the beautiful scenery and events I have enjoyed. I notice the regular rhythms of work, rest, and play. Suddenly, I'm not thinking about my imperfections. <



ACT ON IT:

How can you celebrate the story of your life as it is right now? Spend time thinking about the good things in your life, not the things you want to change.

november 6-12

NOVEMBER>DECEMBER 2017 **11**

WEEK THREE • DAY SIX

PRESENT IN THE BODY

BODY MOVEMENT

WEEKEND!

I have been dancing my entire life. My mom tells me I danced even before I was born. As a child, I created my own dance routines to Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody," using flashlights for special effects. So I was not surprised when, at the age of 23, I found my way to Nia: a combination of dance, yoga, and martial arts. In a South Austin studio, I was invited to "play like a child"—and I looked around, self-consciously thinking, *Is this for real?* People of all ages, sizes, and colors were moving, dancing, galloping, playing, and laughing with joy. Their energy was infectious. As I slowly began to join them with the moving of my feet, the deep breath of my body, the circling of my hips, the shimmying of my shoulders, a slow, wide smile spread across my face. Before long, I knew I was home.



3

breathing in

CLAIRE K. MCKEEVER-BURGETT

Since then, I have danced in church fellowship halls, at youth camp, in my own backyard, in public parks, in my living room, in a sanctuary, at community centers, and yes, even in my office. Sometimes the dance involved my whole body;

other times, only my breath. Dance is movement, so the flow of breath in and out offers the simplest, most basic dance move.

As I write these words, I cannot divorce dancing, breathing, and moving my body in sacred ways from

what is going on in the world. Our black and brown brothers and sisters continue to be killed. Police officers are slain. Terrorists leave bodies mangled and dead. As I read the news, I feel my body caving in on itself.

36 NOVEMBER>DECEMBER 2016

november 28–december 4

WEEK THREE • DAY SIX

PRESENT IN THE BODY

BODY MOVEMENT

WEEKEND!

I grieve, feeling helpless and alone in the face of terror and fear.

In these moments I turn to breath, to dance, to movement. The mind, body, and spirit, after all, are not disconnected; the mind does not float above, severed from the heart. The spirit touches not only the heart but also the feet, the hips, and the arms. As breath comes in, the chest expands. As breath goes out, the shoulders relax.

In the midst of violence, terror, death, and my own

relational worries, I play a hopeful, upbeat song. I reach for my son, lift him into my arms, and begin to dance. The next day, I place my feet flat on the floor, open my hands on my lap, close my eyes, and breathe—in and out, in and out. When I open my eyes, I feel lighter and freer than I have in days.

Some people may think that hand and body movements or breath practices don't seem to do much for anyone except the person doing

them. However, I hold that these simple movements are the seeds of loving the world, one another, and ourselves in ways we long to be loved. If change does begin with us, then I pray that we find our dance, our movement, our breath—inviting change, creating joy, and increasing love—in and out, in and out. It's that simple. It's that profound. <

Claire K. McKeever-Burgett is ordained clergy in the Alliance of Baptist tradition. She teaches dance, yoga, and barre in Nashville; is mother to her beautiful son, Wade; and enjoys spontaneous dance parties.

and out

4 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Today, in the midst of all that is happening in your life and in the world, try placing your feet flat on the ground and your hands on your lap in an open, receptive position.

- > Breathe in your fear, discomfort, anger, sadness, grief.
- > Breathe out all you want for yourself, your family, your friends, your world.

By breathing in whatever you feel, you claim your feelings, admitting that they exist and that they matter. By breathing out what you want for yourself and the world, you are able to dream and envision a new reality that begins with breath, movement, air, and power; that fuels hopes, ignites dreams, and sustains prayers.

Breathe in and out for a few minutes. When you feel complete, gently open your eyes and trust that your breathing is your prayer and that the God who is love not only hears you but also breathes with you and within you—in and out, in and out.

WEEK THREE • DAY SEVEN

PRESENT IN THE BODY

IN TUNE

WEEKEND!

listen¹¹ to

Body, mind, and soul are all connected. If we neglect one, the others suffer. But if we stay healthy with diet, exercise, and spiritual disciplines, we feel better all over. God created us as physical creatures and calls us to honor God by paying attention to our bodies and taking care of them the best we can.

GET ENOUGH SLEEP

The first commandment says, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3, NIV). Homework, sports, technology, family, and friends can keep us from sleeping and can also become like idols if they get in the way of our relationship with God. Learning to manage our time and to set boundaries is necessary to maintain our overall health and to glorify God. The best approach to getting enough sleep is to set priorities. What is important enough to keep you awake? What can you give up so that you have enough time to sleep? Remember to keep God as your first priority!

Taylor Dixon, 18 [Kennesaw, Georgia]

EXPRESS YOUR EMOTIONS

I cry at movies. In our society, a man's crying is often seen as a sign of weakness. But God created us with emotions so that we can feel things and express our feelings in healthy ways. Bottling up our emotions can negatively affect our health. So if you cry at movies, cry! Expressing our emotions can bring us closer to God and, in turn, may bring other people closer to God.

Curtis Mittendorf [Sioux Falls, South Dakota]

14 MARCH-APRIL 2017

march 6-12

WEEK THREE • DAY SEVEN

PRESENT IN THE BODY

IN TUNE

WEEKEND!

your body

EXERCISE

Running allows me to breathe fresh, crisp air into my lungs. It also provides me with an incredible close-to-God experience. When I run, I feel that I am using my body as God intended—to strive, push, and reach for more difficult goals. I feel alive. For me, running is a form of worship. As I stretch my legs, striding faster and faster, savoring the beauty of creation all around me, my heart sings praise to God.

Kate Underwood [Dekalb, Illinois]

TAKE A BREAK

I can always tell when I've pushed myself too hard. My body begs for rest; but too often I keep going at breakneck speed, believing I can handle everything—but I can't. We aren't meant to continue nonstop. We need breaks. The times we feel as if we can't pull ourselves away from daily responsibilities may be exactly the times we need a break. Do you need a moment of stillness? Pause and let Psalm 46:10a (NIV) breathe healing into your soul: "Be still, and know that I am God!" <

Tynea Lewis [New Holland, Pennsylvania]

12 NEXT DAY STRETCH

TREAT YOUR BODY AS A GIFT FROM GOD

Ever heard someone say, "I can do what I want with my body"? Our bodies are given to us by God, and we don't want anyone else telling us how to care for them. First Corinthians 6:19–20 tells us that we are to honor God with our bodies. They are not ours to do with as we please. Our bodies are precious gifts given to us to take care of and to love. We are not our own; we belong to God.

God, help us to care for our bodies in the ways you want us to, knowing that they belong to you. Amen.

Emily Acker [Plover, Wisconsin]

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MARCH•APRIL 2017 **15**