



Micah (Lehman) Kavedzik

Be here now. Live here now.

As a mother of two, soon to be three, little children my world sometimes seems pretty small. Though I work as the training coordinator with OM Balkans, the bulk of my life is spent keeping our household intact. In this phase of life I feel more than ever the call, the desire to fully live life each day, right where God has placed me. The devotionals for this week focus on spiritual disciplines that have become key in my life for doing just that. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun's book, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (IVP Books, 2005), has been central in helping me write these reflections and contains many more practical ideas and exercises for those interested in digging deeper into these disciplines.

BIBLE READING: Nehemiah 8:8-12

Celebration, taking delight and joy in remembering a person, event, or action. Today is a day of celebration. A day to rejoice and experience anew the promise that the joy of the Lord is strength.

Nehemiah 8 recounts the history of the exiled Israelites as they return home and become reacquainted with the Law. As they realize the heaviness of their sins and how far astray they have wandered from God, they weep. Yet Nehemiah calls them out of mourning and into celebration.

We need to set aside times of celebration in our lives to remember where we have come from, the things God has done for us, and the hopes he has for us for the future. To identify and pursue that which brings the heart deep gladness is a first step in moving from a mentality of scarcity to a mentality of abundance. It cultivates a spirit of gladness, enabling us to know the strength of God's joy.

Exercise:

- Take a moment to consider in which place you are most able to connect with God. It could be a specific location or a general setting (nature, listening to music, corporate worship, solitude).
- Now, go to that place, or place yourself there mentally if you are not able to be there physically.
- Tell God how you feel and about the joy you receive being in this place.

SONG: Amazing Love

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Today I celebrate your love, your sacrifice, and the hope of life and a future with you.
THANK YOU!

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BIBLE READING: Mark 8:6

When Jesus is faced with the task of feeding a multitude of hungry people in the middle of nowhere and with very few resources, there is no indication that he is stressed or overwhelmed. He calmly takes what is available and with confidence thanks God for what he has been given. Jesus knew that the situation was in God's hands and he chose to trust. In the same way we are all given the power to interpret our circumstances. Regardless of the situation, we can choose to recognize that God is God, that he is present and in control. We can choose trust and gratitude. Or we can choose to focus on our own abilities, or lack thereof, feeding our critical tendencies and sense of entitlement. As we foster a spirit of gratitude, we begin to view everything we receive as the gift that it is. We become more aware of God's presence in each situation.

Exercise:

- Identify a particular hardship that you are currently going through.
- What are the first thoughts/feelings/emotions that come to mind when you think of this hardship?
- Tell this to God.
- Look for evidence of God's presence in this situation.
- What is something that you can be thankful for in this hardship?
- If you are struggling to find God in your hardship, spend a moment with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. What does he have to share with you?

SONG: Give Thanks

PRA YER SUGGESTION: Thank you for the gift of today and all that it holds. Turn my mind and heart to you as you lead me through this day.

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BIBLE READING: Mark 14:22-24

The night before he is killed, Jesus dines with his closest friends. He acknowledges his own body is about to be broken and his blood poured out for many. He offers bread and wine to those who will soon betray him, scatter in fear, and deny even knowing him. Jesus lifts the cup, marking a path for forgiveness before his friends even realize they need it.

Having just celebrated Easter, these events are fresh in our minds. Christ's sacrificial love is probably forefront in our thinking. But the true challenge is that we allow his sacrifice to become a regular pattern for our own spiritual journey. The early believers broke bread together continually, nourishing themselves, experiencing unity as a body with their hearts focused on praising God. To *break bread* is to proclaim Christ's victory and redemption. It is also a mirror into your heart, revealing your spiritual poverty and need for Christ.

Exercise:

- Prepare yourself for *breaking bread* using John 13:1-7 to help your mind focus.
- Imagine that you are sitting with Jesus.
- What thoughts are running through your mind?
- How do you feel as he washes your feet?
- What emotions do you have as you drink the cup knowing your own betrayals?
- Confess your sins, and as you *break bread*, communicate with God what is going on in your heart.

SONG: Breathe (Michael W. Smith)

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: It is incredible to realize that the path of your forgiveness has already been laid. As I consider the dark areas of my life, I pray that your light and love will refresh my soul. I need you.

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BIBLE READING: Matthew 15:1-9

Traditional. Contemporary. Charismatic. Liturgical. The ways of focusing on and responding to God are many and varied. Just as God reveals himself in different ways and by different names in Scripture, so different facets of his character are revealed through myriad forms of worship.

This is not to imply that anything goes. Quite the opposite. Since true worship is of the heart, we are then confronted with the question of engagement. With what is my heart filled and focused? Worship is about meeting God, bringing him pleasure, putting yourself in a place to be filled with the wonder and mystery of the Creator of the universe. By creating us as unique individuals, God has also given us the gift of being able to seek him and love him in our own unique ways. Ultimately, true God-worship is putting him first. Is that an accurate description of your time at church—but more importantly—your life as a whole?

Exercise:

- Set yourself before God with an open and ready heart.
- Ask yourself what you value most.
- Consider this same question from the viewpoint of those closest to you in life, including God.
- What do you learn about yourself as you look through their eyes?
- Is there anything about the way you worship that might need to change?

SONG: Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Reveal the areas of my life that I am withholding from you, the areas where I am not practicing authenticity.

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BIBLE READING: Hebrews 4:1-10

It is hard to image a person turning down a free vacation, a weekend away, time to fully rest and relax separate from everyday cares and problems. Yet that is exactly what I do when I refuse to embrace God's gift of *Sabbath rest*. Genesis 2:3 recounts the first Sabbath. God rested on the seventh day and created a standard of rest for mankind.

But *Sabbath rest* is not just about setting aside one day a week; rather, the seventh day becomes a springboard for a life of trust and reliance on God. The physical observance of resting on Sabbath speaks into the way we live and choose, or do not choose, to rest in God. The Genesis account of creation does not mention an evening on the seventh day. In the same way, when we choose to embrace God's rest, it is a gift that speaks into each day. It is a gift that helps us see God for who he is. By choosing a spirit of rest, I choose to recognize my human limitations, my need for God. Through obedience, I trust him with my life.

Exercise:

- Are you tired? Take a moment to contemplate if your tiredness is related to your body or soul.
- What kind of rest would bring refreshment to your body?
- What kind of rest would bring refreshment to your soul?
- Set aside two times this week when you will specifically engage in rest for your body and soul.

SONG: Jesus I Am Resting, Resting

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Teach me how to choose a spirit of rest. Show me the ways I am resisting your rest today.

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BIBLE READING: Philippians 1:9-11

At the recommendation of a friend, I recently watched the movie *About Time*. What began as a lighthearted adventure develops into a meaningful look at what it means to truly live and engage life. It has been a few months since I watched the film and still I find myself contemplating its message.

To live and engage in the now of today, I have to be intentional. The spiritual discipline of *examen* is one tool that can help bring this level of awareness into our lives. Through taking time to look back at one's day and answer specific questions, a person becomes more open to God's movement in everyday life. Once we become aware of both the difficult and beautiful in our lives, they can speak into continual interaction with God through prayer.

Exercise:

Sit quietly, recollecting your day, working your way through an *examen* question. Choose from the examples below.

- How did I give/withhold love in a given situation?
- For what moment am I most/least grateful?
- What was the most life-giving/life-thwarting part of my day?
- When did I feel the most/least connected with God and others?
- Where was I aware of living-out/withholding the fruits of the Spirit?
- In what ways did I experience consolation/desolation?

SONG: Open My Eyes, Lord

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Open my eyes to that which is difficult and that which is beautiful, that I may see you at work in my life and the world around me.

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BIBLE READING: Psalm 139:23-24

I am a good person. Of course there is sin in my life and I mess up, but in general, I'm pretty good at maintaining the image of being a good, moral person. The scary thing about this appearance of good is that it is often the very way I defend myself against sin. If I don't see my sin then I have nothing to confess.

It is only by inviting God to come right in and look at my sin that it can ever be truly dealt with. Through confession I can more fully experience the beauty and healing of forgiveness. By opening myself to God and the process of self-examination the Holy Spirit will reveal my weaknesses and faults, the first step in experiencing renewal and change.

Exercise:

- Set aside a specific time to practice *self-examination* and *confession* with God.
- As you sit with God, ask that his light will penetrate your defenses.
- Consider any ways that you may have hurt others through thoughtlessness, neglect, or anger.
- As the Holy Spirit raises certain situations and individuals to mind, talk to him about how you are feeling.
- Ask for God's forgiveness and strength to forgive.
- Seek practical ways to seek and extend forgiveness to others as well.

SONG: Search Me, O God

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Open my eyes to the ways
I have been selfish today, no matter how big or small.
Teach me a better way.*

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