



Practice the presence

7 PRACTICES FOR AN ANXIOUS AGE
PRINT VERSION

7 practices for an anxious age

This Discussion Guide supports a series of introductory videos. To access these videos along with additional information and recommended resources, please go to [peninsula bible.org/practice](https://peninsula.bible.org/practice). Whether you are going through this individually, as a group, or participating in the Discussion Group, we hope you experience the non-anxious presence of Jesus.

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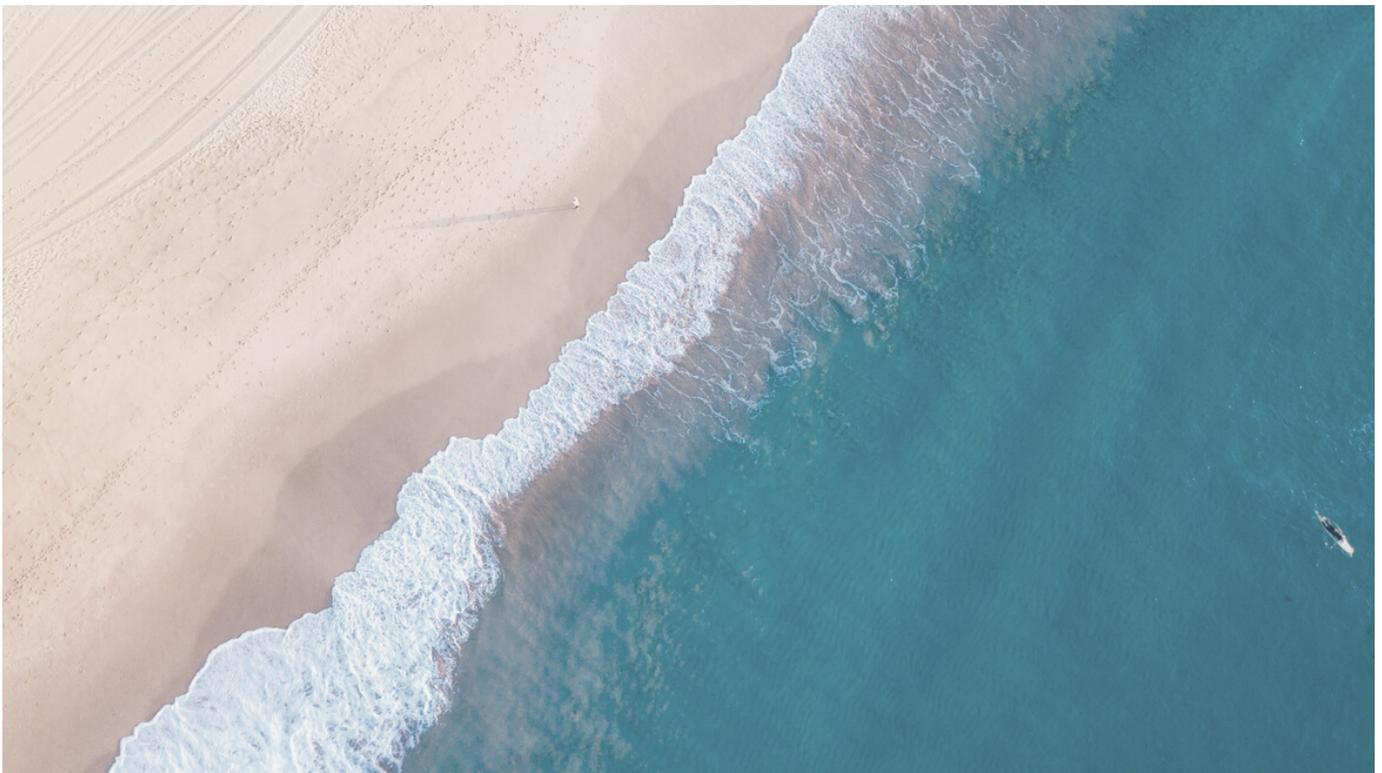
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PRACTICE THE PRESENCE

DALLAS WILLARD

"The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds. This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in thus practicing the presence of God is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to Him. In the early time of our 'practicing' we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God. But these are habits—not the law of gravity—and can be broken. A new, grace-filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the north. If God is the great longing of our souls, He will become the pole star of our inward beings."



00 Introduction

WE LIVE IN AN ANXIOUS AGE.

What does it look like to practice the peace and the presence of God in the year 2020?

It is a time when many are exhausted, grieved, and anxious. In addition to experiencing social distance, many are experiencing spiritual distance as well.

Here's the thing: 2020 isn't over yet. While that might not sound like good news to some, be reminded: Jesus is still Lord. And his invitation is the same: "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

Well that invitation still stands. Even in 2020. What this means is that it's possible to experience the non-anxious presence of Jesus. But it takes practice. As Dallas Willard once said, "Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning."

God is always present, we just aren't always aware. It takes practice. And by dwelling in this truth, we are promised much fruit (John 15:8). Even in 2020. The hope is that your faith would survive, but thrive in Jesus.

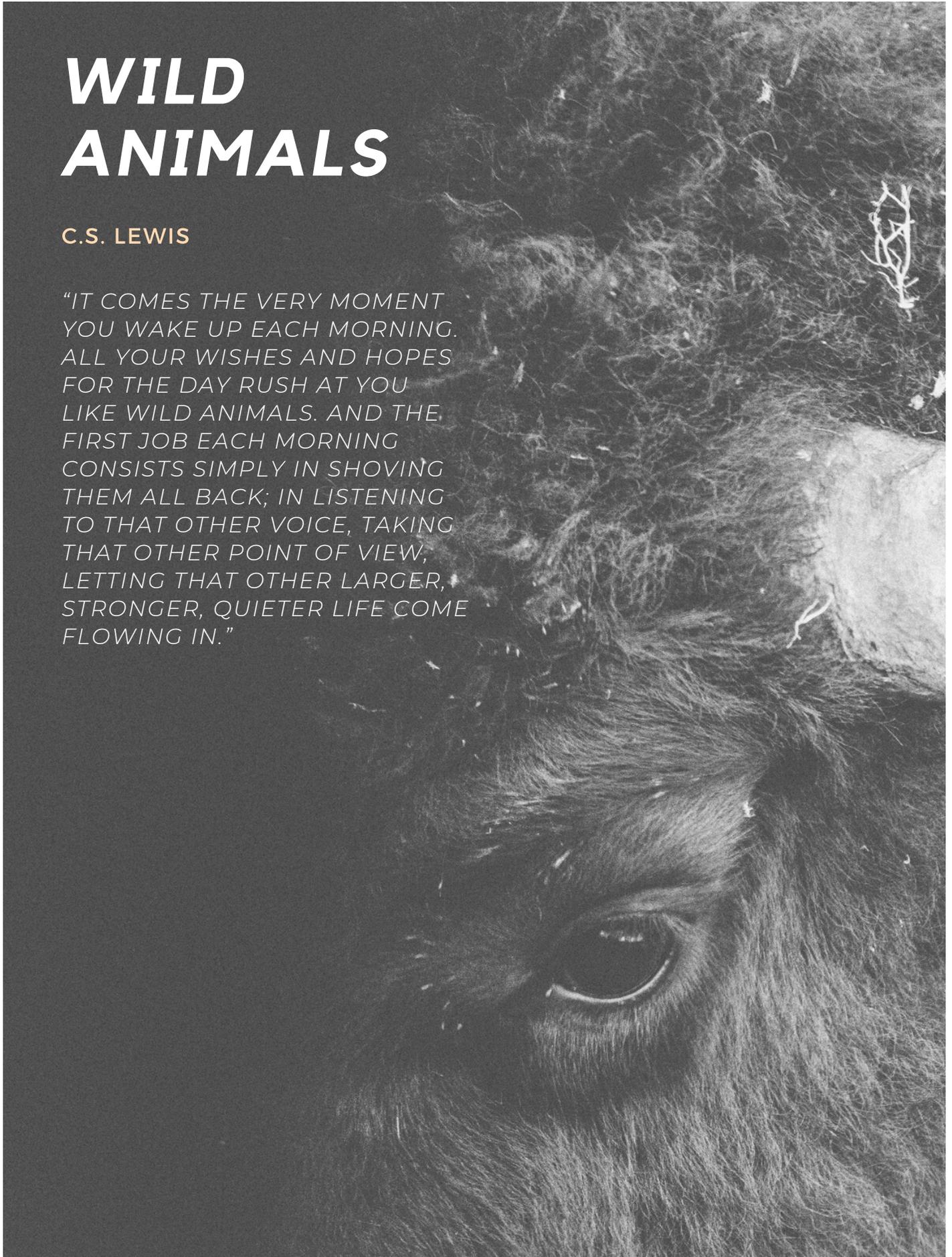
Questions

1. What have been the most difficult aspects of 2020 for you personally?
2. To what degree have you felt spiritually distanced from the peace and presence of God?
3. What do you think is meant by the phrase "practicing the presence of God"?
4. What comes to mind when you consider "the non-anxious presence of Jesus"?
5. Reflect on Jesus' invitation in Matt. 11:28. How do you hope to experience the promise of his invitation in this season?

WILD ANIMALS

C.S. LEWIS

"IT COMES THE VERY MOMENT YOU WAKE UP EACH MORNING. ALL YOUR WISHES AND HOPES FOR THE DAY RUSH AT YOU LIKE WILD ANIMALS. AND THE FIRST JOB EACH MORNING CONSISTS SIMPLY IN SHOVING THEM ALL BACK; IN LISTENING TO THAT OTHER VOICE, TAKING THAT OTHER POINT OF VIEW, LETTING THAT OTHER LARGER, STRONGER, QUIETER LIFE COME FLOWING IN."





01 Begin with God

PRACTICES FOR AN ANXIOUS AGE

Summary

Before everything else comes rushing in for your attention, start the day established in the peace and presence of God through his word and responsive-prayer.

Questions

1. Reflect on the C.S. Lewis quote on the previous page. What are the obstacles (“wild animals”) that get in the way of you starting the day with Jesus?
2. Consider the fact that this quote was written seventy years ago. Often the first thing we do in the morning is reach for our phones. How is the problem Lewis described made more difficult by constant news updates, texts, and social media? What effect might this have on experiencing the peace and presence of God?
3. What do you make of the fact that Jesus found it necessary to withdraw and pray, making it a practice of rising early in the morning to be alone with God in prayer (Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16)?

Practical suggestions

- **Have a consistent time and place** each morning to establish your heart and mind with God. What could this look like for you?
- **Keep back the “the wild animals.”** There's competition for your attention. What will be the hardest part of this for you?
- **Spend time in God's word.** Let the words of God be the thing that sets the pace and emotional equilibrium of your day. What will you choose to read (suggestions on the website).
- **Respond in prayerful meditation.** Having read God's word, let what you've read help shape the way you pray for your day. Offer it up to God for his care.

02 End with God

PRACTICES FOR AN ANXIOUS AGE

Summary

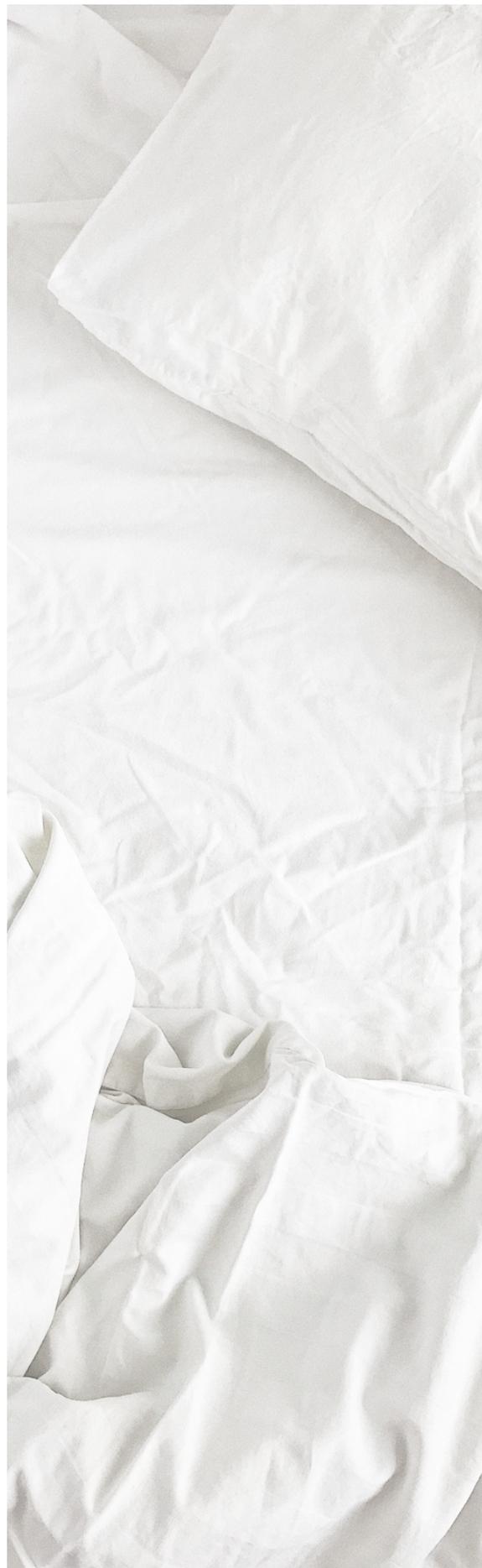
Before drifting off to sleep, walk through the day with God. Remember that he has been with you and loves you. As you do, give him your attention, gratitude, anxieties, sins, and sorrows. And then receive from him his grace and rest.

Questions

1. What is your typical night-time routine before bed during this COVID season?
2. If you could choose, what would you want your heart and mind to dwell on as you drift off to sleep?
3. Read Psalm 127:1-2. What do you think the Psalmist trying to communicate?
4. Have you ever been exposed to the ancient practice of The Daily Examen? (If not, consider reading one of the articles on the website to discuss).

Practical suggestions

- **Set yourself up for success.** Create some margin at the end of your day for practicing the presence of God. What might this look like for you? What might make this difficult?
- **Replay the day.** Take some time to simply be present with God. Then, walk through your day looking for evidences of his grace as well as acknowledging difficulties. Give both to God in gratitude and grace.
- **Receive his rest.** Remind yourself of the security of God's love and care. Receive his rest. You were made for it. Even Jesus needed sleep.



03 Limit Media

PRACTICES FOR AN ANXIOUS AGE

Summary

Media isn't bad, but it requires wisdom. Too little attention is paid to the formative effects that media has on our fears, hopes, and desires (precisely those areas God wants to form). By being intentional in limiting our intake of media, we can practice being more present to God and his kingdom.

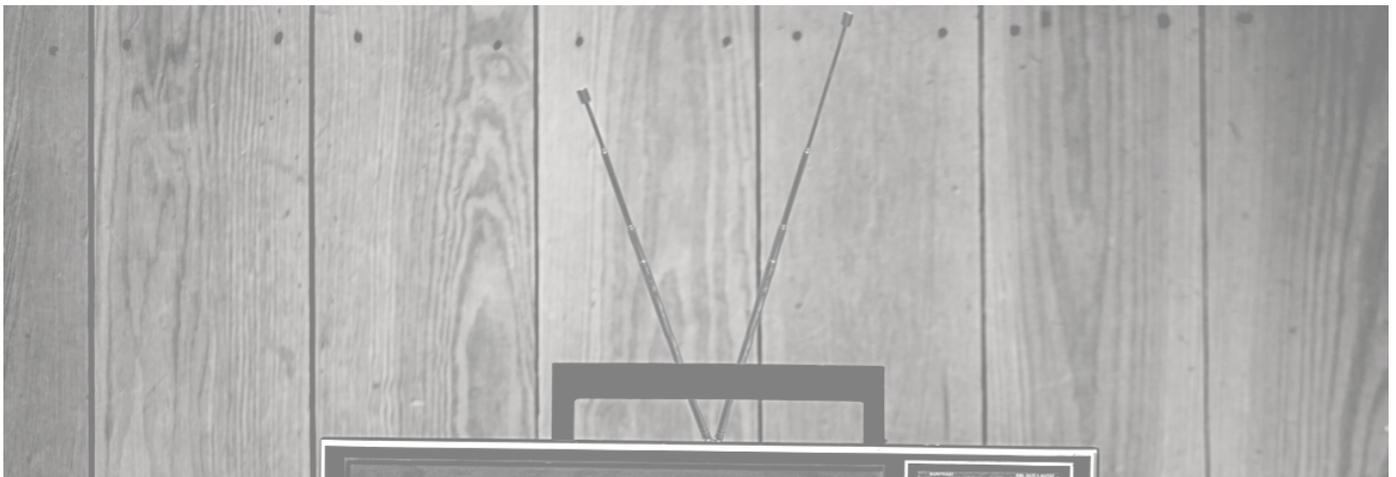
Questions to consider:

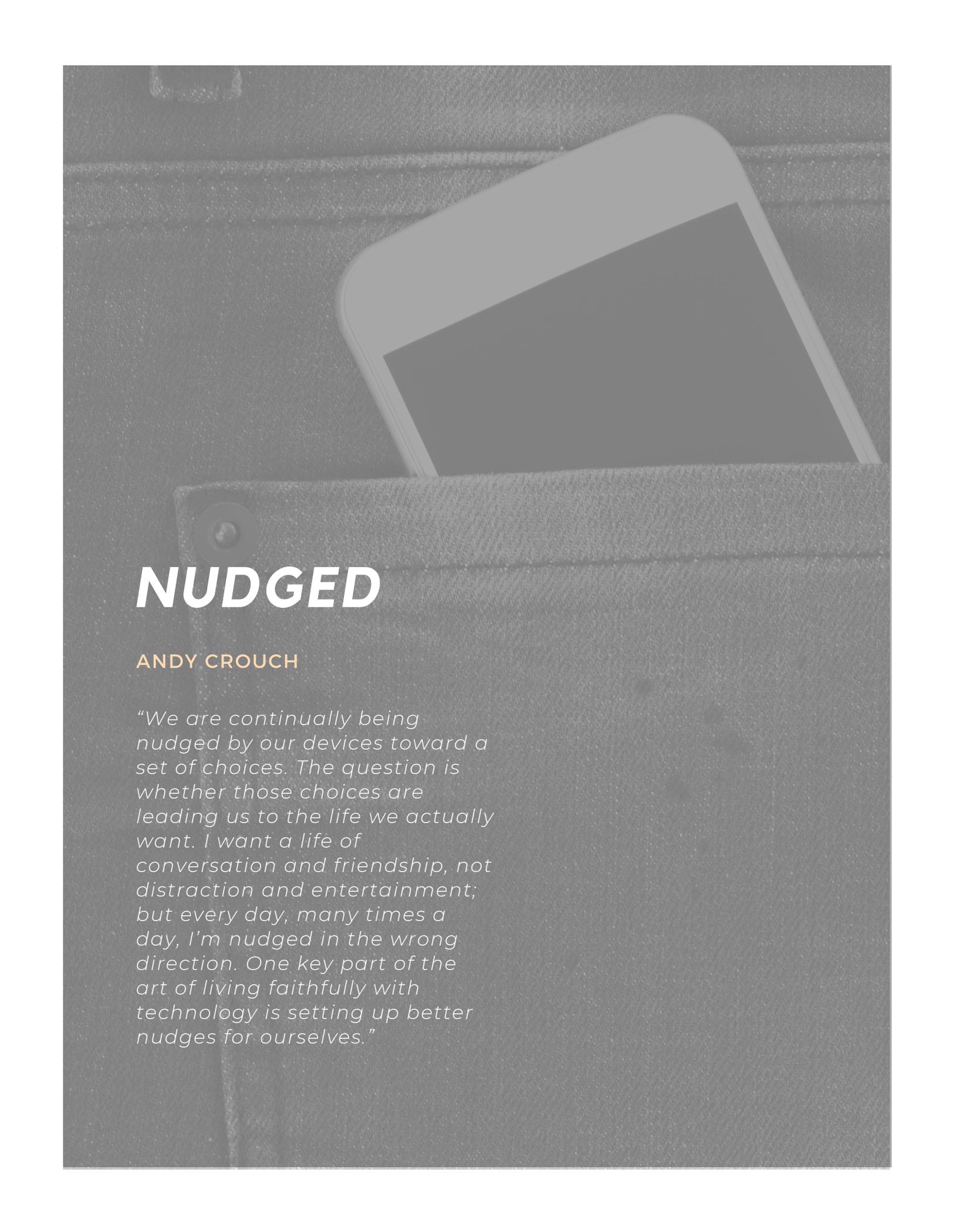
1. What was your reaction to the statistics in the video (average iPhone users are on their phone 2.5 hours a day and touches their phone 2,617x's a day)? Is this important? Why?
2. Reflect on why it is we spend so much time using media (phone, computer, television, radio)? What is it we desire with the hours we give to it?
3. How might media usage affect how we experience the peace and presence of God?
4. What are some helpful ways you might intentionally limit media this season in order to be more fully present with God?

Practical suggestions

Most of these suggestions have to do with phone use, so you may want to broaden the application.

- **Set select times for media use.** But then get off again. It's helpful to set times and limits. How might you be proactive in this?
- **Delete some apps** from your phone. Apps should be a help not a hindrance to your life with God. Which apps might you consider deleting?
- **Turn OFF notifications** on your phone. Notifications are intentionally designed to disrupt and direct your attention. We often have a Pavlovian response to them. What effect might this have on our ability to practice the presence of Jesus? (and what the heck does "Pavlovian" even mean?)
- **Make House Rules.** It's helpful to not just set aside time for being off media, but also space. When might it be appropriate to make some house rules for media use? EXAMPLES could be: phones away for meals and when company is over; phones and tablets not allowed in bedrooms (Really? YES, trust me.)



A photograph of a smartphone lying in a dark, textured pocket. The phone is tilted, and its screen is dark. The background is a dark, textured fabric, possibly a jacket or bag. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the fabric and the edges of the phone.

NUDGED

ANDY CROUCH

"We are continually being nudged by our devices toward a set of choices. The question is whether those choices are leading us to the life we actually want. I want a life of conversation and friendship, not distraction and entertainment; but every day, many times a day, I'm nudged in the wrong direction. One key part of the art of living faithfully with technology is setting up better nudges for ourselves."



04 Grow gratitude

PRACTICES FOR AN ANXIOUS AGE

Summary

Gratitude is the natural response to seeing evidences of God's grace. And his grace is everywhere. It is no wonder that the command to "give thanks" is one of the most often repeated commands in the whole Bible. What's more, gratitude is an antidote to anxiety. While anxiety is concerned with what we do not have in the future, gratitude is concerned for what we do have in the present.

Questions

1. Were you aware that "Give thanks" is one of the most commonly repeated commands in the Bible (alongside "Fear not" or "Praise the Lord")? Does that surprise you? Why?
2. What is gratitude and why is it a particularly Christian virtue?
3. Why do you think that in a book on lament, the author is able to write, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23)? Why is it hard to believe that? What, if anything, has helped you overcome that challenge?

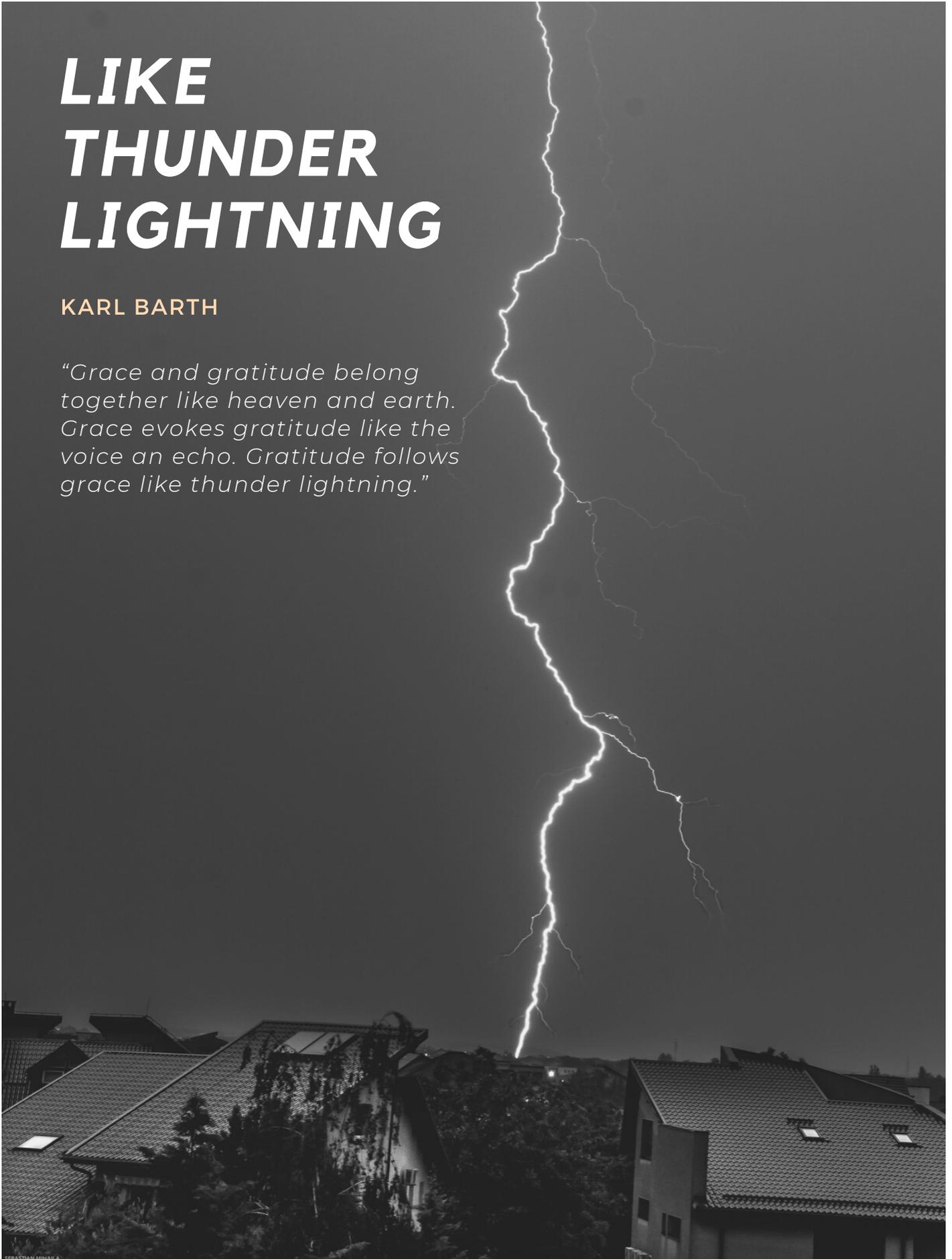
Practical suggestions

- **A daily gratitude ritual.** Find a time during the day to write down 2-3 things you're grateful for.
- **Keep gratitude part of prayer.** Before making requests to God, begin your prayers with thanksgiving for those things which can be taken for granted.
- **If you have kids, make a Thanksgiving chain.** Remember those red and green Christmas chains to countdown to Christmas? Make a Thanksgiving version where your kids write something they are thankful for on a new link as you count up to Thanksgiving day.
- **Removing things that cultivate discontent.** What things in your life breed discontent or comparison? Consider taking a break from certain apps, sites, and stores in order to cultivate gratitude for what God has given you.

LIKE THUNDER LIGHTNING

KARL BARTH

“Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Grace evokes gratitude like the voice an echo. Gratitude follows grace like thunder lightning.”





05 Do something physical

PRACTICES FOR AN ANXIOUS AGE

Summary

Often we don't consider bodies when we think about growth in Christ. Yet God made us, in his image, *body and soul*. As we become increasingly sedentary as a culture, this neglect can be further reinforced. We can neglect how God has made us to experience life around us.

Questions

1. What does it mean to glorify God with the body?
2. Why do you think there is a tendency to neglect our body when we think about the Christian life? Why is this unfortunate?
3. Are there times you have found that how you feel physically can have an effect on how you feel spiritually (or vice versa)? In what ways have you experienced this?
4. Consider the fact that Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us. Consider the fact that we will dwell with God forever with new bodies. How should that impact how we think about the role of our bodies?

Practical suggestions

Do something that reminds you everyday that you aren't simply a soul, but a body also. Doing so helps you to be present to the moment and in so doing, to practice presence with God.

- **Exercise.** If you haven't already, consider having an exercise routine that gets your heart rate.
- **Go for a walk.** A walk has a way of clearing the mind and creates an opportunity to simply consider creation around you.
- **Take up a hobby (non-digital).** Hobbies can have the benefit of slowing you down physically, particularly when it involves use of your hands. EXAMPLES could be puzzles, cooking, wood-working, yard maintenance.



06 Reach out to others

PRACTICES FOR AN ANXIOUS AGE

Summary

God's design has always been a people (not simply individuals). He created us to be a particular kind of community. Think of the many metaphors for the church: a body, a family, a building, a nation. Is it any wonder that Satan desires to keep the people of God in isolation? We were designed to experience (and extend) the peace and the presence of God to one another.

Questions

1. Why do you think the enemy delights in keeping Christians in isolation?
2. Why did God delight to create us for community?
3. What might it look like to actually cultivate deeper relational ties during a time of social distancing? Creatively, how might this look?
4. Why is it particularly important during a time of deep divisions (racially, politically, culturally) to embrace unity in Jesus which cuts across all such divisions? What can this look like?

Practical suggestions

- **Ask God** who he would lay on your heart to reach out to
- **Make a list** of names that come to mind. Don't over-think this ("Did God really lay this person on my mind?"). Go with it. God knows what he's doing
- **Pray for those names.** Lift up the people that come to mind and pray for God's care on them.
- **Reach out.** Let them know they came to mind, that you prayed, and wanted to connect.
- **Make it a habit.** What if the body of Christ became stronger during this time of isolation because of how seriously it took our call to love one another in a way that identifies us to the world as followers of Jesus (John 13:35)?



07 Sabbath worship

PRACTICES FOR AN ANXIOUS AGE

Summary

The importance of observing Sabbath is often disputed today. Yet even if one is convinced that it is unnecessary, is there still not benefit and wisdom in observing Sabbath? The principle of Sabbath runs through both the Old and New Testament. It was designed for the people of God to remember all that God had done for them, and to rest in his provision. In a culture that is obsessed with production, Sabbath is a weekly reminder to rest in the peace and presence of God.

Questions

1. Is Sabbath something you have observed before? Why or why not?
2. What significance did Sabbath have in the Old and New Testament?
3. How is Sabbath different from a day off? (check out the article "Good for nothing Sabbath" on the website)
4. How is "worship" a component of Sabbath?

Practical suggestions

- **Set aside one day in 7.** If you can't do a whole day, start with what you can. But make it a weekly rhythm.
- **Guard that time.** If you can, get all your errands and chores done ahead of time. And whatever you do, stay offline. You're welcome.
- **Treat it as a holiday!** Sabbath was the original "holy day" (where we get the word "holiday"). So.... enjoy a holiday once a week! You've got biblical permission.
- **Remember corporate worship.** Sabbath was always connected to corporate worship. Don't neglect gathering for worship (whether online or in-person) during this season.

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**COME TO ME
ALL WHO
ARE WEARY
AND HEAVY-
LADEN AND I
WILL GIVE
YOU REST.**

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