

The great wisdom teachers know that one major change is needed: *how we do the moment.*

“Only one thing is necessary,” Jesus says. If you are present, you will be able to know what you need to know. These are the seers! Truly seeing is both that simple and that hard.

Living in the Now

Delivered by Rick Warren

Sunday, November 19, 2017

Embrace the present moment as an ever-flowing source of holiness. —Jean Pierre de Caussade [1]

Life will give you whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of your consciousness. How do you know this is the experience you need? Because this is the experience you are having at the moment. —Eckhart Tolle [2]

Of all the things I have learned and taught over the years, I can think of nothing that could be of more help to you than living in the now. It is truly time-tested wisdom.

So many leaders in so many traditions have taught the same thing: Hindu masters, Zen and Tibetan Buddhists, Sufi poets, Jewish rabbis, and Christian mystics to name a few. In the Christian tradition, we have heard it from Augustine, the Franciscan Francisco de Osuna, the Carmelite Brother Lawrence, and more recently, Paul Tillich and Alan Watts. Contemporary teachers Thich Nhat Hanh and Eckhart Tolle have done much to help us understand the importance of living in the now.

Delivered by Rick Warren

Tuesday, November 21, 2017

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase “each other”
doesn't make any sense.*

—Rumi [1]

“contemplation” or simply “prayer.” It is a non-dualistic way of living in the moment. Don't think, just look (*contemplata*).

Non-dual knowing is learning how to live satisfied in the naked now, “the sacrament of the present moment” as Jean Pierre de Caussade called it. This consciousness will teach us how to actually experience our experiences, whether good, bad, or ugly, and how to let them transform us. Words by themselves divide and judge the moment; pure presence lets it be what it is, as it is. Words and thoughts are invariably dualistic; pure experience is always non-dualistic.

As long as you can deal with life as a set of universal abstractions, you can pretend that the binary system is true. But once you deal with concrete reality—with yourself, with someone you love, with actual moments—you find that reality is a mixture of good and bad, dark and light, life and death. Reality requires more a both/and approach than either/or differentiation. The non-dual mind is open to everything. It is capable of listening to the other, to the body, to the heart, to all the senses. It begins with a radical yes to each moment.

When you can be present in this way, you will know the Real Presence. I promise you this is true. Wisdom is not the gathering of more facts and information, as if that would eventually coalesce into truth. Wisdom is a way of seeing and knowing the same old ten thousand things but in a new way. It's not about knowing more, but knowing *with* more of you. I suggest that wise people are those who are free to be truly present to what is right in front of them. It has little to do with formal education. Presence is pretty much the same as wisdom!

Presence is the one thing necessary to attain wisdom, and in many ways, it is the hardest thing of all. Just try to keep your *heart* open and soft, your *mind* receptive without division or resistance, and your *body* aware of where it is and its deepest level of feeling. Presence is when all three centers are awake at the same time! The Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh teaches this wisdom through the ceremony and meditation of tea (a Buddhist parallel to the Christian Eucharist):

You must be completely awake in the present to enjoy the tea.

Only in the awareness of the present, can your hands feel the pleasant warmth of the cup.

Only in the present, can you savor the aroma, taste the sweetness, appreciate the delicacy.

If you are ruminating about the past, or worrying about the future, you will completely miss the experience of enjoying the cup of tea.

You will look down at the cup, and the tea will be gone.

Life is like that.

If you are not fully present, you will look around and it will be gone.

You will have missed the feel, the aroma, the delicacy and beauty of life.

It will seem to be speeding past you. The past is finished.

Learn from it and let it go.

The future is not even here yet. Plan for it, but do not waste your time worrying about it.

Worrying is worthless.

When you stop ruminating about what has already happened, when you stop worrying about what might never happen, then you will be in the present moment.

Then you will begin to experience joy in life. [1]

As you eat your next meal—perhaps with family gathered for ~~Thanksgiving~~ ^{Christmas / Hanukkah / Kwanzaa}—enter into the experience mindfully. Savor the aroma. Taste the sweetness. Appreciate the delicacy. Experience the joy—right now—without needing anyone to notice. But they will!

The presence of God is infinite, everywhere, always, and forever. You cannot *not* be in the presence of God. There's no other place to be. It is we who are not present to Presence. We'll make any excuse to be somewhere else than right here. Right here, right now never seems enough. It actually is, but it is we who are not aware enough yet.

All spiritual teaching—this is not an oversimplification—is about how to be present to the moment. When you're present, you will experience the Presence. But the problem is, we're almost always somewhere else: reliving the past or worrying about the future.

As a Franciscan, I have many opportunities to go away for long periods in solitude. When I'm in a hermitage, there's no television, smart phone, computer, or radio. There's pretty much nothing but the natural. You'd think it would be easier to be present to Presence in this setting, and in some ways it is—watching the snow fall, listening to a hawk's cry, walking slowly without any particular destination or deadline. But I can't escape my monkey mind even on retreat. Daily contemplative prayer is crucial to helping me live in the now. It takes constant intention and practice to remain open, receptive, and awake to the moment.

We live in a time with more easily available obstacles to presence than any other period in history. We carry our obstacles in our pockets now, vibrating and notifying and emoji-ing us about everything and nothing. And let's be

honest: most of our digital and personal conversation is about nothing. Nothing that matters, nothing that lasts, nothing that's *real*. We think and talk about the same things again and again, like a broken record. Pretty soon we realize we've frittered away years of our life, and it is the only life we have.

We have to find a way to more deeply experience our experiences. Otherwise we're just on cruise control, and we go through our whole life not knowing what's happening. Whether we realize it or not, the divine energy of God is flowing through each one of us. When we draw upon this Source consciously, our life starts filling with what some call coincidences or synchronicities which we can never explain. This has nothing to do with being perfect, highly moral, or formally religious. I wish someone had told me that when I was young. I would still have been religious, but now in a whole different way—and all the time.

Practice: A Clear Mirror

Both Jesus and Buddha say the same thing: "Stay awake!" Contemplative practice gradually transforms our minds so that we can live in the naked now, the sacrament of the present moment. Without some form of meditation, we read life through a preferred and habitual style of attention. Unless we come to recognize the lens through which we filter all of our experiences, we will not see things *as they are* but *as we are*.

Zen Buddhist masters tell us we need to "wipe the mirror" of our minds and hearts in order to see what's there without distortions or even explanations—not what we're afraid is there, nor what we wish were there, but what is *actually* there. Contemplation is a lifelong task of mirror-wiping. "I" am always my first problem, and if I deal with "me," then I can deal with other problems much more effectively. A clean mirror offers "perfect freedom" (see James 1:23-25).

Mirror-wiping is the inner discipline of calmly observing our own patterns—what we see and what we don't—in order to get our demanding and over-defended egos away from the full control they always want. It requires us to stand at a distance from ourselves and listen and look with calm, nonjudgmental objectivity. Otherwise, we do not *have* thoughts and feelings: *they have us!* A clear mirror allows us to simply see the reality of *what is*.

The real gift is to be happy and content, even when we are doing the "nothingness" of a chore, a repetitive task, or silent prayer. When we can see and accept that every single act of creation is "just this" and thus allow it to work its wonder on us, we have found true freedom and peace.