When the company I work for recently offered an eight-week "Mindfulness Training" workshop led by Brown University and available to our 8,000 employees as chargeable time, I hesitantly signed up.

I hesitated, you see, because I'm keenly aware that both at work and in life in general, I'm not nearly as mindful as I'd like to be. In the span of six seconds, my brain can go from the eye doctor appointment I need to make, to the tense conversation I had with a colleague last week, to where I'd like to travel to in summer of 2022, to what I'm making for dinner that night.

As a Type A personality, I have in the past prided myself on being a master of multitasking—of being able to push through the dozen things on my never-ending to-do list. Twenty years ago, people used to boast of their ability to juggle multiple things at once. It used to be considered a professional strength. I know some variation of the words "strong ability to multi-task" has appeared in a number of my performance evaluations over the years.

But multitasking means being only partially focused on many things—our attention is divided. Sources say the average employee checks Facebook 21 times a day and email 74 times a day, shifts computer screens—say from a document to a website—more than 500 times a day, and interrupts themselves almost as much as they are interrupted by others.[1]

In recent years, scientific studies have revealed the negative effects of multitasking. Everything from feeling stuck, to forgetfulness, to becoming easily distracted, to increased mistakes. Effects that can lead to increased frustration, to feeling overwhelmed, to high blood pressure, poor sleep, toxic stress, depression, and anxiety. These effects impact not only our work lives but also our home life, family structures, social lives, and our everyday interactions.

Mindfulness, on the other hand, can be understood as enhanced, purposeful attention and awareness—as being truly present in the moment. The potential benefits include increased focus, emotional regulation, creativity, better memory, and overall improved physical, emotional, and mental

[1] Attorney Liability Assurance Society guidebook

health, leading to increased resilience, happiness, and sense of balance—supporting our ability to cope, thrive, and choose well.

I'm sold on the concept but generally doubtful of my ability to "pass" this class at work, though it isn't really graded. During our daily 12-minute body scan homework exercises, my mind wanders repeatedly, a cross-country road trip, if you will. And I confess that in actual road trips, whether that to be the grocery store down the street or further, I continue to have the experience of arriving at my destination, and having no recollection at all of the route I took there.

How many of you have had that experience? How many of you have found yourself overwhelmed with multitasking, with the competing distractions of work, extracurricular activities, family obligations, social media, political discourse? Mindfulness clears space and gives us the ability to focus on the important things.

As I studied today's scripture, I was struck by the thought that St. John the Apostle might have been somewhat a

practitioner of mindfulness. Notice he speaks multiple times of abiding in Jesus and he in us: he uses the word "abide" six times in the Epistle and eight times in the Gospel.

John is fairly direct in his message. God is Love. Jesus is Love. That Love abides in us. John's verses "affirm without qualification that the very nature of God is disclosed in love—love for God and for fellow human beings..." While for this particular passage, John may be speaking to love within the Christian community he's addressing, these verses have become "a touchstone for the centrality of Christian love for all persons, deriving from the experience of divine love displayed in the life and work of Jesus Christ."[2]

This is not a complex notion—that God is love. It's the stuff of our Sunday school curriculum, and if you surveyed Christians around the world with the question, What is one word you would use to describe God, I'm willing to bet a great majority would respond with some variation of "God is Love."

[2] The New Interpreter's Study Bible, Abingdon Press, 2003.

But though not complex, it's not necessarily an easy thing to carry out. And John seems keenly focused on this point of us realizing God's presence—the essence of that being Love—within us. The Epistle tells us "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." The Gospel recalls Jesus' command: "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me"—the Greek word for abide meaning to remain, or dwell within.

If we lived each moment centered on the knowledge that Jesus actually dwells within us, as near as the very breath we breathe and the blood coursing through our veins, what would our life and labors look like? How much more fruit could we bear? How might the world be different?

Well, we might notice our focus shifting, or something along the lines of the pruning that Jesus speaks of in today's Gospel. As we zone in on the knowledge of Jesus abiding in us, we may find unrealized benefits in our faith practices.

Our prayer lives could become richer, whether that be kneeling at our bedside or during the Eucharist or while walking a neighborhood trail, noticing a hawk soaring above. Our daily activities—everything from cooking dinner to mowing the lawn, could become an opportunity to offer gratitude to God—an intentional act of prayer.

Our worship and study of scripture too might become more meaningful, as we notice things in our liturgy and readings that align to God's presence within us—an awareness that might help us worship not as a rote, ritualistic practice but as a living, breathing act of connecting with God. A focused attention that could help us to inwardly digest Scripture not just as a historical text written over 2,000 years ago, but as God's living word, applicable to all aspects of our everyday lives.

This kind of mindfulness might also benefit our ministries—possibly moving us away from stale patterns and habits, helping us to be more intentional, more inclusive, more creative, in addressing the needs of our church community and of the world.

If we were to become more mindful of Jesus abiding in us, we might experience a prioritizing of our time and energy that actually simplifies our lives and cuts down on stress and anxiety. We may very well experience greater intimacy with God. Perhaps an improved ability to tune in and actually hear the still, small voice of our Creator, to better discern his purposes for our lives, and to truly realize our worth as beloved children of God. So beloved that He sent his son Jesus, who *abides* in us. We might be able to let go of guilt and shame and those worldly addictions we turn to, to try to fill the void of our self-esteem.

A mindfulness of Jesus abiding in us could mean deeper relationships with others, as we become less judgmental, and more prone to see Christ in all people. Richer relationship with God, with others, and with self, an intertwining of healthy, fruit-bearing branches and vine in one Divine vineyard.

John himself knew this kind of relationship. John is believed to be "the disciple whom Jesus loved," someone who shared a deeply intimate bond with his teacher. At the last supper, it is John who leans on Jesus' breast. In Jesus' last hours, John is

the lone apostle who remains at the foot of the cross, along with the women who loved Jesus. John is the disciple whom Jesus asks to care for his mother Mary, and the first to reach the empty tomb.

Can you imagine how intentional mindfulness of Jesus abiding in us could give us that kind of depth in our relationship with God? A confident sense of his enduring presence and grace, both in times of joy and celebration, as well as in our moments of pain and suffering.

To be mindful of God abiding in us, the God who is pure, unadulterated Love, entails an understanding that love is a choice—an intentional act. Love is not the breathless feelings of attraction and infatuation that we see on TV or that we often feel for another person in the early days of a new relationship. Love is an action, as tangible as the words "bear fruit." It is the basis for our discipleship: seeing others' needs not as *their* suffering but as *ours*—borne by the entire body of Christ, ours to minister to, to serve, to heal, so we may all grow and bear fruit together.

When we become aware of Christ abiding in us and in others, we can center ourselves on Jesus' imperative to act in love. Not just with those we like, those who share the same politics, those in our same socioeconomic sphere, but all God's children.

My own mindfulness practice is a work in progress. Indeed, the class teaches this as a building of mental muscle—a daily lifestyle practice akin to exercise or eating right. But despite the many distractions of our lives, we can all strive to be more mindful of Jesus abiding in us, in each beloved child of God.

Abide in me as I abide in you. Love as I love. John gives us a glimmer of God's character and eternal nature in these words, and we can hold on to that spark and take each moment of each day to focus our minds, hearts, and spirits on this knowledge. In this way, grounded in the love that dwells within us, we will see the fruits of our life and labors do glorious things for the kingdom of God.