



CENTERED Podcast – Week 2, Practice 2 - Yoga

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David: Hey, everybody. I'm David Dillon and this is Centered - an exploration of spiritual practices for everyday life. We are so glad you are here. No matter your experience with God, faith, prayer, or spiritual practice, this is a podcast designed for anyone who would like to live life with just a little more balance and health, a little more centeredness and less distraction, a little more compassion, and less anxiety. We are so glad to be with you.

For today's episode, I once again have Stina Hoberecht joining me across the desk who will be walking us through another spiritual practice. So welcome back, Stina!

Stina: Thanks! Great to be back!

David: So last time you unpacked for us some of your convictions about how our physical health and emotional or spiritual health are really interconnected with one another; you can't separate them. And then you guided us through a simple exercise to help us be more aware and in tune with our physical bodies as an act of prayer and worship. And now today, you want to take us deeper into that practice through a similar exercise called yoga.

Now I know that some Christians see red flags when they hear the term "yoga," saying things like "yoga was developed for a religious purpose." For such a person there is great difficulty in separating yoga from Hinduism. So, before you take us into this exercise, can you address that heart-felt concern that some Jesus-followers have?

Stina: Absolutely. You know yoga is one of my favorite movement practices for taking care of my physical body, taking care of my emotional health, and feeling centered. And I know sometimes people are put-off by the word yoga... Yoga as a practice does have its roots in ancient India and the Hindu religion. And I think it's important that we recognize that, because I don't want to take credit for something that I didn't invent. But yoga can really be viewed as a set of tools that encourage centeredness- physical, emotional, and spiritual - and we can choose to focus on the centeredness of our relationship with Christ.

The word "yoga" in the Sanskrit language actually means "to connect or to unite," and so as we talked about last time, there has been a misguided tradition in Christianity for hundreds of years to falsely separate that connectedness – that the spirit is good and the flesh is bad. So we can view yoga as a tool or a tradition that helps us to reconnect mind and body, as well as connecting ourselves to God.

David: So this says to me that while we need to be wise and discerning as followers of Jesus, we needn't live in a posture of fear. Would you agree that God's general revelation of himself through all people, who are created in his image, means that sometimes, people who may not follow him directly, or cultures that have other religious traditions, still may in fact have some really good things that we can learn from?

Stina: Definitely! It makes me think of how there are so many ways that we benefit from practices and traditions that were created by people who might view the world differently than we do. And I think of Augustine's famous quote that said "all truth is God's truth, and when one encounters truth, one encounters the God whose truth it is."

David: That's really good, and so true! There is so much of God's fingerprint found throughout all of creation. And I like what you said - that we shouldn't take credit for something we didn't invent. We can learn from other cultures, and we needn't hunker down in the safety of a hermetically-sealed Christendom, where at its worst, life is defined by a rather narrow world-view that when played out really isn't that biblical. Instead such a view is often driven by fear and really designed to keep others out.

There is so much common ground with other cultures and examples of God's truth and grace to be learned from outside of the walls of the church. So let us be wise, discerning, and of course biblical, but let's do it without a posture of suspicion simply because something is foreign to us.

Stina, I am really looking forward to this so take it away!

Stina: Great! So today we're going to move through a gentle, chair yoga sequence. I always like to say the most important rule in yoga is that you take good care of yourself. So please be listening to your body, and don't do anything that's not good for you. It's always a good idea to try things small, and then if small feels okay, go a little bigger. But we're going to keep this yoga practice really friendly today, so don't worry about it!

We're going to be seated in our chair, so if you have a chair that is pretty solid, pretty firm, that's usually a good chair to use.

See if you can sit kind of to the edge of your seat, so that you have feet on the floor. And take a moment to make yourself a little bit taller.

Drop your shoulders down and back; make your neck long. If you like you can close your eyes, and just take a couple of breaths.

You might check in with yourself and just notice - how are you feeling emotionally today? How are you feeling physically today?

I like to use my imagination a little bit. So you could imagine - if there has been any craziness or any stress going on in your life - you could imagine taking that stress, putting it inside of a box, and putting that box outside the door.

It doesn't mean that our stress doesn't matter, it just means that we are going to intentionally take a step away from that for a moment, and take a step into our centeredness.

Just take a couple more breaths. Notice the feeling of sitting in your chair.

We're going to start with stretching our neck, and we always want to be really careful with necks.

So keeping yourself tall, drop your chin down to your chest. Let gravity do the work, and just feel your head become heavy.

Then slowly, lift up your chin until you're looking up to the sky. If it feels okay, you could even drop your head back. And gently bring it back to the middle.

Turn your chin over your right shoulder, like you were going to look behind yourself, and feel a little stretch on the side of your neck. And then gently turn your chin over your left shoulder. Bring it back to the middle. And we'll tip the right ear towards the right shoulder, so you're tipping your head to the side. Again let gravity do the work, feel your head get a little heavy. And then gently tip to the other side.

And bringing it back to the middle, we'll put that all together. So nice and slow, roll your head around the circle. If you find a spot that feels really good you can stay there a little longer. And you might want to take your circle both directions.

When you're ready bring it back to the middle, and shrug your shoulders a few times. Rolling your shoulders down onto your back. Feel your shoulder blades squeeze towards each other.

Next we're going to arch and round our spine. So this is one where I definitely recommend trying it small, and then if small is okay, go a little bigger.

So you're going to sit tall, resting your hands on your lap. Start to lift up your chest, pull your shoulders back, and look up to the sky, arching through your spine.

Then, go the opposite direction. Round your spine, relax your shoulders, and look down.

And we'll do it again with the breath. So see if you can breathe in while you arch and look up, and then breathe out when you round and look down. And one more time - breathe in while you look up, and breathe out when you look down.

Beautiful. Bring it back to sitting up tall, and we'll take a twist. Gently turning your upper body to one side. Try to keep yourself tall while you twist. Take a breath in, feel yourself get a little taller. And when you breathe out, maybe turn your head a little further.

And then gently twist to the other side. Take a breath, feel yourself get taller, maybe turn that head as you breathe out. And bring it back to the middle.

Bringing your hands in front of you, you can either interlace your fingers and then turn your palms to face out and reach your arms up overhead, or, if that doesn't work, you can just grab your hands together as you reach up overhead. And we'll take a lean to one side - so as you're leaning over to the side feel yourself get longer, like your arms are reaching out to the side. Then bring it back to the middle, and lean over to the other side.

Come on back to the middle, release those arms, and if you like, shake it out a little bit.

I always love that sequence of moving through our spine because what we just did is we moved our spine in all the different directions our spine can go. And by moving in all those different ways, we just help to keep our body happy and healthy.

So next we'll come to the lower half of our body. Sitting in your chair, find your right foot and reach that right foot in front of you. And you can wiggle it out a little bit - maybe roll your foot in a circle, maybe wiggle your toes, maybe point and flex your foot.

Sitting towards the end of your chair, set yourself up so that that right leg is straight in front of you, with the heel resting on the ground. We're going to lean forward into a hamstring stretch, so take it slow and start to lean in towards your leg. Just go as far as you want to go, but see if you can find a place where you can stay, and take a couple of big breaths. You might even notice that breath bring you just a little bit deeper into your stretch.

When you're ready to come back up, take it slow, come on up, and shake out that leg. I always like to take a second to notice the difference from one side to the other. I feel like the leg that we stretched always feels a little bit longer.

And we'll do the same thing on the left leg. So take that left foot in front of you, wiggle it out a little bit - rolling it, wiggling toes, point and flex your foot. And then set up for that stretch - sitting towards the edge of your chair, left foot in front of you with the heel resting on the ground. Keep yourself tall as you lean forward, and just go as far as you want to go. Take a couple of breaths, feel that breath deepen your stretch.

And when you're ready to come back up, take it slow and shake it out.

One of my favorite quotes about yoga says that "yoga is not about being able to touch your toes, it's about what you learn on the way down." And that can apply in a lot of different ways: when I reach towards my toes I might learn that I'm tighter on one side, and not on the other. And that could be helpful to know how to take care of myself. I might also lean towards my toes and learn that I really hate uncomfortable situations, or, that I love a challenge. So all different ways that we can tune in and just learn a little bit about ourselves.

Come back to sitting up tall, just like we did at the beginning. We're going to take a moment to connect our breath and our movement together - remember the word "yoga" means "to connect."

So sitting tall, with your hands at your sides, take a big breath in and while you breathe in stretch your arms up high overhead. Then when you breathe out, press your palms together and bring your hands down in front of your heart.

And we'll do that again - breathe in, stretch your arms up high. Breathe out, press those hands together and bring them down. And one more time - breathe in, reach up. And breathe out, bring it down.

Keep those hands right in front of your heart, and take just a moment to tune in to yourself one more time. Notice how you're feeling, and like we did before - maybe finding a little bit of gratitude for this body that we have, a little bit of gratitude for this breath that we have, and gratitude for our Father, Creator, who made these amazing bodies.

Take a big breath in, hold your breath for just a second, and gently breathe it out.

We always say "thank you" to each other at the end of yoga by saying the word "namaste," which is another Sanskrit word. Sometimes it's translated as "my soul honors your soul." Sometimes it's translated as "the light inside of me sees the light inside of you." So when I think of that phrase I really think of the Imago Dei - the image of God - that we each carry. And when we say "namaste" to each other, we are recognizing that the person in front of me reflects

the image of God, and that I reflect the image of God. And that's a powerful thing to remember in each other.

So if you like, the way we do it traditionally is to have your hands in front of your heart, and you can take just a little bow forward, and you can say to yourself or anybody who might be with you - "namaste."

Thank you so much for joining me for this chair yoga practice today. I hope it felt good for you. Maybe it was a little bit outside of your comfort zone. I'm so glad you were willing to give it a try. If it's something that you enjoy, or something that you might want to explore further, we'll put a couple of links in the description to some Youtube videos that you can follow if you want to give it a try.