

My Dear Fellow DVULI Comrades,

In our spiritual quest to serve in what is often demanding and overwhelming urban youth ministry, it is imperative that we learn self-care and how to work with, not against, our minds, our bodies, and the Holy Spirit that abides within.



Bernard Franklin (Kansas City 2001)

We should not wait until our bodies are depleted, our spirits run down, our emotions frazzled, and our minds so jumbled with details that we shut down because we have not learned how to listen to and respond to the needs of our body, our mind, our emotions, and our spirit.

Our true spiritual power to perform at our best and often at a moment's notice lies not in external circumstances but within our own internal discipline and practice.

THE BODY

To ensure staying power, strength, energy, and mental, emotional, and spiritual sharpness, you must learn self-care—how to listen to your body and how to discipline your body. Don't wait until a cold, the flu, COVID, or some other illness hits you to slow down. Develop a daily practice to follow certain disciplines. Nourish your spirit with prayer and your body with wholesome food and water. Exercise regularly and care about sleep and rest. Just as our cars require maintenance and repairs, so do our bodies and spiritual selves. Scripture advises (1 Cor. 6:19) that you should treat your body as a precious vessel worthy of love, respect, and gratitude, for it carries you through the demanding journey of ministering to those who need a self-disciplined response and care the most.

THE MIND

Now, let us turn our gaze to the realm of the mind. See your mind as a fertile, green, productive garden where thoughts and emotions grow like delicate flowers. Take charge of your garden by cultivating thoughts of spiritual wisdom, reason, and virtue. Weed out negative seeds of doubt and fear. Just as a skilled gardener tends to their plants, nurture your mind with positive affirmations, spiritual truths, and the special, loving company of an uplifting community of souls. Remember, my friend, that Scripture reminds you (1 Cor. 10:5) that you have the power to choose your thoughts and direct your focus. Embrace this power and cultivate a garden of tranquility and resilience within your mind.

THE POWER OF THE INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT

Lastly, consider the Holy Spirit, the abiding inner Spirit that gives life meaning and purpose. Imagine the Holy Spirit as a flame burning brightly within you. Allow yourself to be consumed by this fire and align your actions with your biblical and spiritual core values and principles. Fan the flames of your spirit by engaging in practices that nourish your soul through meditation, contemplation, or connection with a mentor or coach who can pour back into you what you have given away to others. You can't give out of an empty well. And you can't guide others where you won't go. Let the Holy Spirit be a guiding light, illuminating the path of darkness into the marvelous light for your youth and others you serve.

My dear comrade, remember that taking charge of your body, mind, emotion, and spirit is a lifelong journey. It requires patience, discipline, and self-awareness. Embrace the personal power of God that resides within you, for He has given you the ability to shape your own destiny by your choices and behaviors.

START YOUR DAY WITH HIM

Checking in daily with your mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical self in your morning devotionals is an important way to direct your attention during the day with purpose. If you don't know where you're starting and how you are really feeling, how can you mindfully and spiritually move forward? The more you intentionally check in with yourself as part of a routine, the easier it will become—you'll eventually perform these check-ins without even knowing it!

IF YOU'RE NEW TO THIS ROUTINE, BELOW IS A PROCESS TO INCORPORATE SELF-AWARENESS IN YOUR DAY:

THE GIFT OF QUIET SPACE

Learning to be quiet with yourself first thing in the morning will become a gift to you.

Jesus often left the disciplines alone so He could go to a quiet place. I don't think he used many words, as He and the Father are one. I imagine Jesus sitting quietly in communion with the Father, drawing life without a long, wordy prayer. Just He and His Father.

You can be quiet in bed before your feet hit the floor or go to your regular quiet space after you have woken up.

FOLLOW THIS CHECK IN

I suggest you follow this check-in before you begin your prayer time. You may know what specifically you need to pray for later if you start this way. It may take you 5-10 minutes or less.

Roll over on your back or side in a position that will not cause you to doze back off to sleep or sit up in your chair with your feet planted on the floor.

- Take a couple of deep breaths.
- Settle your brain and body.
- Let your dreams pass.

- Spend a minute to focus on your breathing. This is your only task.
- After a few minutes, you should notice how your body feels and if it is easy to calm and relax.
- Your thoughts may keep jumping to the long list of things you need to do. That's okay. Just guide your thoughts back to being quiet.
- After some practice, you will soon feel more connected to your whole self and can begin to listen to the still, small voice within that wants to guide you in your morning preparation for your day.



ACTIVITY JOURNAL

Having too many thoughts swirling in your head this early in the morning can make focusing on personal check-in challenging. It's hard to check in with your personal state when you have so much on your mind. A great way to disarm this overwhelming feeling that can block your check-in is to establish a journaling routine at the end of your workday or early evening, but not before going to bed. List the things that were not completed today and may need attention the next day. Done. Let it go. So, when your brain wants to bring up your list, say to yourself, "I wrote them down last evening," and stay focused on what you are feeling early this morning.



REQUEST A JOURNAL!

PERSONAL WELLNESS CHECKLIST

Start your morning by checking in with yourself. One of the most basic and important check-ins we can do is with our physical body. Not only should you connect to your body in the morning to set an intention for the day, but check-ins throughout the day will help your mind and energy refocus on what's most pressing.

Checking your personal state throughout the day is an integral part of mindfulness. Being present with yourself and knowing the most prevalent feelings can allow you to focus your time and effort in a way that works with those parts rather than against them.

With these exercises, you'll be able to easily check in with your entire self every day so that you can mindfully move toward personal success!

CHECK-IN EXERCISES

As you lie in bed or sit in a chair, become aware of your breathing. Take a breath from deep in your belly. Exhale, and then take another deep breath.

YOUR BODY

Now, become aware of your body. What are the sensations? *(Pause)*

There may be places in your body that are more tense or relaxed; just notice them. No judgment. No need to change anything. Just bring your loving attention to your body. Become aware of the temperature—where, in your body, you might feel warm or cold. Maybe you notice tingling or places that feel numb or blank. Just notice. *(Pause)*

Now, ask your body what the most compassionate thing you could do for it is. *(Pause)*

In this moment, what kind of compassion does your body need from you? Or want? Just listen for what your body tells you regarding how to express compassion for it. Your body may say it needs less caffeine and more water today; it may need more vegetables and less fatty carbs; it may need to complete your step goal today. *(Pause)*

Notice how it feels to listen to your body with your compassionate curiosity. Take a moment to acknowledge this precious gift from God and all your body does for you. Your body is a source of amazing movement and coordination, so take a moment to appreciate some of its qualities. *(Pause)*

Softly say, "Thank you, body." Notice how your body responds to your gratitude. *(Pause)*

YOUR INTELLECT

Now, bring your attention to your intellect, the thinking part of you. What is your intellect thinking at this moment?

Notice any thoughts and opinions and whatever may be happening in your mind. Again, no judgment; just bring your loving awareness to your intellect. Notice what is happening to your intellect. Let the "to-do" list go for now. *(Pause)*

Tune in and ask your intellect what is the most compassionate thing you could do for it. It could be something very simple, like just being appreciated by you—or to stop overthinking something you said or did or something someone said or did to you. Listen for its answer. *(Pause)*

Notice how it feels to be engaging with your intellect from a place of compassionate curiosity. Now, take a moment to remember some of the amazing qualities of your intellect. Your intellect works hard to recall information in your brain. Bring your loving appreciation to your intellect. *(Pause)*

Softly say, "Thank you, intellect." Notice how your intellect responds to your gratitude. *(Pause)*

EMOTIONAL SELF



Bring your attention to your emotional self. Tune in and notice what you are feeling right now. You may have more than one emotion at this moment. Again, this is just noticing, no judgment, no attempt to change or fix, just awareness. What are you feeling? Are you sad, happy, joyful, thankful, nervous, or anxious about something that happened yesterday? *(Pause)*

Ask your emotional self what is the most compassionate thing you could do for it. *(Pause)*

Just listen and notice how your emotional self responds to your compassion. It may say to have compassion for yourself, to love yourself today, to love that little person in you who may not have been affirmed or loved by your supervisor. You may have felt ignored or belittled. Let your emotion help you acknowledge that feeling so you don't shut it down and stuff it any longer in your body. Now, take a moment to acknowledge this part of you for its resilience, vulnerability, and courage. Call to mind some of the qualities you appreciate about your emotional self. *(Pause)*

Say softly out loud, "Thank you, emotional self." Notice how your emotional self responds to your gratitude. *(Pause)* Take a moment to thank the Holy Spirit for all the ways He provides guidance and support. Take a moment to thank this wise, magnificent, unprogrammed Holy Spirit for all the many ways He guides you in your life and for bringing you to the healing that is unfolding for you. Say softly out loud, "Thank you, Holy Spirit."

CLOSING



Take a deep breath *(pause)* and gently bring your awareness back to your body, here in this room, in this space, wherever you are. As you take another deep, cleansing breath, *(pause)* tune in to what you are feeling now and find a word or two for it. *(Pause)*

Now, slowly open your eyes, staying present in your inner state as you become present in the room around you.

Take a moment to write down the messages you received from your body, your intellect, your emotions, and the Holy Spirit. This may become the focus of some of your prayers and devotions for the day. Recall the message(s) throughout the day that your body, intellect, emotions, or the Holy Spirit had for you.

This is a method of becoming focused on your spiritual and personal development. It helps you become more self-aware and join the Holy Spirit in His active role in your life. You become a partaker working with, not working against, the Holy Spirit to serve perhaps some of the most broken, marginalized youth.

You got this!

Bernard Franklin, PhD

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