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The busyness of the holiday season is behind us like a train that has barreled through the station and is now just a dot on our horizon. But even though the, often overwhelming, season is gone many folks find that the winter months seem heavy with unfulfilled expectations and too much time indoors, making life seem monotonous. This is a good time to be intentional about emotional and physical self-care; to look for moments alone and with others that can help restore us. Restoration (“to bring back to a state of health”) is something unique to the individual. For some it may be a long soak in a sweet smelling bubble bath, for others a [not so]quiet afternoon at an action movie. Still others may find their energy increased and spirits lifted by an overdue phone call with a friend or sitting alone staring at the birds as they begin their morning song. Perhaps it’s opening the fine bottle of wine you’ve been saving for a special occasion (that occasion could just be *you*, you know) or the satisfaction of preparing and serving a special meal to loved ones. It could be specific meditations that help renew your spirit or reading something for enjoyment rather than work. Maybe it’s a date night with someone special or maybe it’s dinner out by yourself to your favorite place. Restoration doesn’t have to be expensive or complicated, but it is usually intentional. What will you do this month to bring yourself back to a state of health? *JV*

Last year I wanted to learn the hows and whys of what makes mindfulness so effective, so I picked up *Buddha’s Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom* by Rick Hanson, Ph.D with Richard Mendius, MD. They suggest that we can make small changes in the way our brains work and have big, positive effects in the overall quality of our lives. One strategy is to recognize emotional “darts.” Here’s how these darts work: say I get home to find my cats have knocked the lid off the treats jar and have spent the entire time I was gone inhaling treats. The first dart thrown is the irritation I feel at the fact that my cats can’t be satisfied with the cat food that’s 10 feet away, they must pry the lid off the treat container and chow down in my absence! The second dart thrown is me becoming mad and berating myself for having left the treat jar out where my cats could get it. But guess what...while first darts are going to happen, second darts are optional! By being mindful of first darts (“wow, I can see I’m really irritated right now”) and recognizing we might be susceptible to self-inflicting a second dart, we can keep ourselves from throwing them (“I can feel the irritation, but these things happen. No need to blame myself...I’ll just give them a small dinner tonight and put the treats in the pantry where they can’t get them in the future.”) Mindfulness helps us to recognize negative emotions before they spiral out of control and trigger more and more second darts. *Buddha’s Brain* does a great job of helping the reader really understand and put into practice the time-worn phrase: “Pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional.” *SN*

Have you spent time with a two year old lately? As a grandmother, I have the luxury of being able to spend time with my two year old grandson without multitasking. The other day we were in a store and he asked for a sugar cookie. We went to the bakery section and he picked out his favorite. I opened the box and handed him one. He took the cookie with a smile and proceeded not to just eat it, but enjoy it! He held it out and looked at it. He turned it over and looked at the back then at the front again. He carefully studied the sprinkles for a moment. He smelled it... then took a small bite. He chewed slowly as he continued to study the cookie continuing bite after bite in similar fashion while comfortably leaning back in the cart. It took a good five minutes to get to the last bite. The whole time he had such a content look his face. He was experiencing the cookie and enjoying the moment, that moment in his life.

In its simplest form, mindfulness is “awareness of experience with acceptance”. (Ronald D. Siegel) Mindfulness is giving up the notion that we always have to be multitasking and replaces it with becoming fully present in our lives. How often do we miss the moment, big or small, because we are thinking about what happened this morning or what is possibly going to happen tonight? How many beautiful moments of connection do we miss because we are too concerned with trying to avoid discomfort or emotional pain? Mindfulness gives us a way to effectively deal with these physical and emotional feelings. They are a part of the human experience. They don’t define us. When we accept and experience every aspect of our lives, we are free to fully enjoy every moment, every experience and every person in our lives. *TW*