THE ART OF BEING PRESENT

A seven-day reset for your attention, your phone, and the people around your table

A practical invitation to give the people in front of you the gift of your attention.

A companion resource to Every Table an Altar

Before you begin

Our attention shapes our relationships. A phone can help us stay connected to people who are far away, while also interrupting our ability to notice the people who are close. This seven-day reset offers one small practice each day, especially around shared meals.

This is an experiment, not a test of willpower. You can adapt each day to your work, caregiving responsibilities, accessibility needs, or safety. Keep essential calls and alerts available. If you miss a day, simply return to the next meal.

Start with a baseline

At your next meal, notice when you reach for your phone. What prompted it? Was it a notification, an uncomfortable pause, or simply habit? Observe without scoring yourself.

A simple opening prayer

Jesus, help me receive this day as a gift. Teach me to notice the people before me and to make room for love in the ordinary moments of my life. Amen.

The rhythm

Each day includes a Scripture reference, one concrete practice, a table conversation, and a reflection. Read the passage in your preferred Bible translation.

DAY 1 / Psalm 90:12

Notice the pull

WHY THIS DAY

Paying attention begins with noticing what competes for it.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Keep your phone where you can see it during one meal, but leave it untouched. Notice the moments you feel drawn toward it. After the meal, write down what you observed.

AROUND THE TABLE

When do our devices help us connect, and when do they interrupt us?

REFLECT

What did I reach for my phone to avoid or find?

_____

_____

_____

DAY 2 / Luke 10:38–42

Clear the table

WHY THIS DAY

The physical presence of a device can make checking it feel like an option, even when it stays silent.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Before one shared meal, place every nonessential device in another room. If you need to remain reachable, allow urgent contacts through and keep one designated device nearby but out of sight.

AROUND THE TABLE

What changes when nothing on the table competes for our attention?

REFLECT

How did the meal feel different?

DAY 3 / James 1:19

Listen all the way through

WHY THIS DAY

Listening requires space for another person to finish their thought.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

During one conversation, resist rehearsing your response. Let the other person finish, then ask a follow-up question about what you heard.

AROUND THE TABLE

What helps you know someone is really listening?

REFLECT

What did I learn when I listened longer?

_____

_____

_____

DAY 4 / Mark 6:31

Recover the in-between

WHY THIS DAY

An unfilled moment can become a place of rest.

TODAY’S PRACTICE

Choose a ten-minute transition today, perhaps after work or before dinner, with no scrolling. Take a walk, sit outside, or simply let your mind settle before joining others.

AROUND THE TABLE

Which moments of the day feel most rushed?

REFLECT

What did I notice in the space I usually fill?

_____

_____

_____

DAY 5 / Psalm 19:1

Make room for wonder

WHY THIS DAY

Wonder grows when we make time to notice what is already around us.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

At a meal, ask each person to name something beautiful, surprising, or interesting they noticed today. Leave time for the stories that follow.

AROUND THE TABLE

What caught your attention today that you might otherwise have missed?

REFLECT

Where did wonder show up today?

_____

_____

_____

DAY 6 / Romans 12:13

Offer an open chair

WHY THIS DAY

A screen can become a tool for inviting people into shared life.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Use your phone intentionally to invite someone into a real conversation or meal. Send a specific invitation, then put the device away and give your attention to whoever is with you.

AROUND THE TABLE

Who might be glad to know there is room for them at our table?

REFLECT

How can technology serve hospitality this week?

_____

_____

_____

DAY 7 / Colossians 3:17

Choose a lasting rhythm

WHY THIS DAY

A lasting practice grows from a clear, realistic commitment.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Choose one repeatable phone boundary for the coming month. Examples: devices away at dinner, no phone for the first fifteen minutes after arriving home, or a weekly screen-free meal. Tell someone your plan.

AROUND THE TABLE

What shared practice would help us feel more present to one another?

REFLECT

What is realistic enough to keep?

_____

_____

_____

Your presence plan

Choose a rhythm you can practice for the next thirty days. Write it clearly enough that someone else would know what you mean.

My one phone boundary

_____

_____

When and where I will practice it

_____

_____

Who can help me keep it

_____

What I will do when I slip

_____

A closing prayer

God of every ordinary moment, thank you for the people you have placed in my life. Help me use my attention with wisdom. When I am distracted, bring me back to the person in front of me. Let our tables become places of welcome, honest conversation, and joy. Amen.

The aim is not a perfect streak. It is a life with more room for people.