

Authenticity and Emotional Awareness

Two Activities in Building Your Cornerstone

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When I first began to clean up my work-life-barn balance, I created a reading list which became what Emily P. Freeman calls a 'guru collection.' I read books on strategy, goals, relationships, collaboration, and teamwork. What I didn't realize was that I had missed the first steppingstone: **presence**. I bypassed the trailhead and jumped right into the first hill without preparing my tack, my horse, or my soul for the metaphorical ride. I was searching for external solutions to vaguely defined problems. It took years of looking into the mirror of many horses to finally see that my spirit must be grounded before I even begin to describe a situation or name an issue. I must prepare from the inside out to avoid the armor Brené Brown speaks of in *Dare to Lead*—self-protection, being right, fear of vulnerability, scarcity mindset, shame, and blame. This armor is heavy, and once you start releasing it, your shoulders and neck will thank you.

Why Presence Matters

The first step to anywhere ...work, family, faith, or the bar...is presence. Presence means being mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and professionally anchored in the moment. It is the non-negotiable state that establishes the Holy Ground within you.

Authenticity & Body Awareness

The Authenticity Check you completed earlier is foundational. It helps us see ourselves and feel emotions in our bodies. Yes—emotions live in our bodies! Stress, anxiety, unforgiveness, and discontent all show up physically. Horses do this, too. If you've never asked your equine massage therapist where your horse holds tension, try it. For research, see "The Body Keeps the Score" by Bessel van der Kolk, which explains how traumatic stress is encoded in muscles, neural pathways, and the autonomic nervous system. Humans and horses both store and reflect emotional tension through muscle readiness, breathing, and autonomic responses. This shared mechanism enables horses to mirror human states biologically.

Pillar Focus: Presence

Presence is the non-negotiable state of being fully anchored in the moment.

Exercise: Grooming with Intention

Purpose: To cultivate presence by engaging in all senses and aligning breath with movement.

Preparation: - Choose a quiet space where you and the horse feel safe. - Gather grooming tools (brush, curry comb, hoof pick). - Pause before starting: Stand near the horse, take 3 slow breaths, and set an intention: 'I will be fully present with this horse and this moment.'

Step 1: Connect Before Touch: - Approach calmly, observe body language. - Place your hand gently on its shoulder or neck. - Match your breathing to the horse's rhythm.

Step 2: Begin Grooming Slowly: - Start at the shoulder with slow, rhythmic strokes. - Notice texture, temperature, and sound. - Keep eyes soft—alternate between looking and feeling.

Step 3: Integrate Breath: - Inhale as you begin a stroke, exhale as you finish. - If your mind wanders, return to sensation and breath.

Step 4: Scan for Tension: - Notice flinches or tightness. - Pause, soften energy, breathe deeply. - Reflect: What does this tell me about my own tension?

Step 5: Close with Gratitude: - Stand quietly for 1–2 minutes. - Place a hand on its shoulder and silently thank the horse. - Take three slow breaths before leaving.

Reflection Prompt: What did I notice about my body, breath, and thoughts during grooming? How did the horse respond to my presence?

Exercise: Breath Prayers

There is a simple rhythm to life. Breath. Scripture talks about this in Ecclesiastes, and we can practice it to help us be more present and aware of our emotions in our bodies. Subtle hint: it also helps to write scripture on our hearts for later use. Breath prayer anchors our attention in the present and focuses the mind on a simple rhythm, reducing mental clutter and grounding awareness. This breathing regulates the nervous system and activates the parasympathetic system, lowering stress and calming emotional reactivity. The physical act of breathing and the spiritual intention integrate body awareness with inner values, revealing emotional signals. We begin to notice tightness in our chests, shallow breathing, and clenched hands and jaws. Here are some scriptures to pray for each emotion.

When You Feel Anxious

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

Inhale: “Peace of God...”

Exhale: “...guard my heart and mind.

When You Feel Fearful

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10

Inhale: “You are with me...”

Exhale: “...I will not fear.”

When You Feel Overwhelmed

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28-30

Inhale: I bring you my burden

Exhale: You give me rest

When You Feel Angry

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” James 1:19-20

Inhale: Slow to speak, slow to anger

Exhale: quick to listen

When You Feel Lonely

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Psalm 34:18

Inhale: The Lord is close

Exhale: The Lord saves

When You Need Courage

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

Inhale: I am not afraid or discouraged


Exhale: God has the plan



Courage

Joshua 1:9

Inhale: I am not afraid or discouraged
Exhale: God has a plan.



Anger

James 1:19-20

Inhale: Slow to speak, slow to anger
Exhale: Quick to listen



Anxiety

Philippians 4:6-7

Inhale: Peace of God
Exhale: Guard my heart and mind.



Overwhelm

Matthew 11:28-30

Inhale: I bring you my burden.
Exhale: You give me rest.

