Mindfulness can save your life. Okay, maybe not really; but it certainly can show you how to live. Being mindful is about being present and in the moment. When we spend our time thinking about the future this can produce anxiety. When we find ourselves lingering in thoughts of the past, this can manifest into depression. Neither of these aforementioned options allows you to enjoy the very moment that you could be experiencing. The past no longer exists and the future is merely an idea of what could be. The here and now is what living truly is. It is NOW and it tends to be the one we avoid the most.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, Professor of Medicine emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, a world-famous leader in mindfulness, and the founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program, offers the following definition “Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” Let’s break that down to gain a better understanding.

First, it’s important to note that being mindful and being aware are not the same things. You can be aware that you are feeling irritated with a friend. However, to be mindful would mean that you are purposely aware of every sensation that the senses are experiencing with the irritation, as well as the response to those sensations, such as your breathing. It would mean noticing what the mind wanders to without attaching yourself to any of the thoughts.

To pay attention in the present moment is to recognize that that mind is designed to think and to be accepting of the fact that it will wander. The point here is to simply notice what the mind is thinking about without following “the rabbit trail” of the thought and getting lost in it. Being present, in a mindful way, is to acknowledge the thought by recognizing what it is. It is to recognize that we’re thinking about the past or the future and to allow the thought to move about like a cloud drifting into and out of consciousness.

Mindfulness is a state of emotional non-reactivity. It is continuing to be aware, cognitively, of how we are experiencing things but to not attach any emotional value to it. It’s a process of letting go of evaluation such as identifying something as “good” or “bad”. It also includes any expectations of a mindfulness practice. Sometimes we want to experience something in particular and/or decide that what we are currently experiencing isn’t acceptable, so we label it and judge it. It’s important to recognize that whatever the experience is we are having, it is treated with equanimity. Whatever we observe, we simply notice it and nothing more.

Want to learn more about Mindfulness? Please consider joining the Mindful Mondays group: Monday’s, April 20th to May 4th, from 2-3PM. To learn more or sign up please contact: Shannon.Moseley@tamuc.edu or 903-886-5145.