

In praise of gravity

My understanding of God has become a welcome object of gravity, as it moved from heady abstractions to my gut.

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I took a couple of weeks off of running. The weather was frigid and I was recovering from some dental work, which made it so that I couldn't quite get out there without my head pounding like my jaw had been struck by a ball peen hammer. As the days passed, inertia began to do its work. I savored the smell of my coffee. I lingered over

the newspaper. I relished the extra time that I suddenly had in the morning. I also noticed the extra weight that the air seemed to have as it pushed down on me.

About the same time, I had a birthday, which made me aware of my body moving at a different pace. Of course, I didn't slow down *on that day*, but the celebration of another year passing was a big enough milestone to make me look around, and sense the change.

It's like all of a sudden gravity has become an entity, a force that I notice. While the air used to be something that I bounced around in without much thought, now my core has grown more solid and longs to be rooted. My limbs yearn to be anchored to the earth in some unfamiliar way. I feel more centered.

In some cases, I fight the gravity. I exercise my back muscles and try to maintain a straight posture, because our modern spines are beginning to take on a prehistoric curvature as we bend over our shiny screens. When I begin those runs, I feel more sluggish, and yet, I persist.

In other cases, I resent the gravity. I can't go five minutes on Facebook without the Internet tenaciously reminding me about the different things that gravity will do. The algorithms have intuited my age and so they constantly try to sell me remedies for crepey chests, jowly cheeks, cellulite thighs, sagging necks, and hooded eyes. I didn't even have a vocabulary for half of these things, but now I know I can buy a remedy. (Did you know that there is skin cream that costs three digits of dollars for double digits of ounces? Did you know that if you do facial exercises for 30 minutes a day you'll look three years younger?)

But for the most part, I appreciate the gravity. I now wake up, aware of my soles touching the ground. I notice the solid footing. I'm grateful for the miracle that the earth is beneath me, supporting me. When I get particularly concerned about the state of the world, I remind myself that everything that I need to exist grows from the soil—the beauty, the nutrients, and the life. Driving through the terrain in Tennessee, springs bubble up, filtering through the permeable rock. Suddenly that metaphor—that God is the ground of all being—gains a profound substance and weight.

My understanding of God has become a welcome object of gravity. Over these years, it moved from heady abstractions to my gut. Theology used to take up incorporeal space in my thoughts, as it danced around with ideals, doctrines, and philosophies,

and it didn't really need to be anchored in embodied reality. As I preached, I focused on God, without regard to humanity. I spoke about divine attributes without noticing how those thoughts affected bodies. I didn't worry about what my creeds would do to my neighbor. I ignored how doctrines played out through history.

Yet, everything has now shifted, and I realize that I cannot think of God apart from my body and my neighbor. So, I welcome this gift of age, of slowness, and of gravity.