

CARE RESOURCES @ ROCK BRIDGE

BE KIND TO YOURSELF: RELEASING FRUSTRATIONS & EMBRACING JOY

The ways we talk to ourselves about the things that are bugging us are part of a practice of self-kindness. As we learn new ways of dealing with the moments of difficulty in each day, we make space for the moments of joy to take greater hold of us. Scripture tells us to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). Giving our attention to what it means to love ourselves may feel selfish. Yet, even Jesus took time away from the crowds he was teaching to pray. What follows are several practices that help you identify and work with the daily pain you may carry, and to also embrace the things that bring you awareness of God’s very good gifts. Pick up the practices that you are drawn to and let the others go in keeping with Jesus’ offer of the “unforced rhythms of grace.”

A DAILY RECORD

Commit to 30 days of recording the answers to these two questions:

- 1) What’s bugging you?
- 2) What’s bringing you joy?

You can record these in a special notebook or just write it in a journal you already keep. There’s also a printable at ivpress.com/be-kind-to-yourself that you can download if you’d like more space to write or would like to add art from magazines or your own illustrations. Having this daily record to review will help you with some of the practices listed below. If asking yourself, “What is bugging me?” doesn’t resonate with you, try asking yourself, “What is frustrating me?” instead.

PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

Put a picture of a moment that represents a beautiful gift where you will see it often. When you see your picture again, offer a little word of thanks for that past happiness, and let that reminder open up a space of gratitude for you. Gratitude leads to more gratitude once we’ve gotten ourselves into a grateful mental space.

VISION DIVINA WALK

Visio divina (divine vision) involves meditating on an image and asking God to speak to us in that. We can also “read” nature and nature can read (or speak) to us. Take yourself on a walk with your phone and identify something that stirs you. Maybe it’s lovely or interesting. Maybe it’s ugly. Watch your inner response. Both attraction and repulsion can be clues that there’s something more. Sit with three to five of these images, or even combine them in a photo collage. How do they speak to you?

MAKING AN ALTAR

An altar can be made indoors or outside. For example, you could pick up items on a walk, arrange them outside, use the altar for prayer and meditation, and then walk away from it as a way to reinforce the moment but not hold on to it. You can, of course, take a picture to preserve the memory and return to those moments of grace. Or you could gather items indoors on a table or shelf and keep them together as a reminder of grace when you pass by. Still another idea is to have a little prayer table where you sit to pray while holding objects of importance to you. You could change the items seasonally and add a purple cloth during Lent and Advent. This can be a visual reminder of God’s presence with you.

MAKE A LIST

Marilyn McEntyre has a wonderful book called "Make a List". She says, "A list can be a valuable exercise in reframing, which means seeing a situation in new terms." She suggests a great heading for a list would be "What doesn't matter as much as I thought." Other titles for lists could include the following:

- Ways I Can Be Kind to Myself
- Reasons God Wants Me to Be Kind to Myself
- What I Appreciate About Myself
- What I Need (but Rarely Give Myself)
- What I Don't Need

Make a free-form list. Let your mind wander and see what comes up!

WORDS OF COMFORT

As you become more aware of the inner critic, develop some mental patterns for your response when the negative thoughts plague you. Beware of the temptation to berate yourself more when you notice these thoughts surfacing! Instead, offer yourself words of compassion. You may even want to think of yourself as a small child who has fallen and skinned a knee. Have some ready phrases and criptures at had for yourself, such as:

- "God wants you to rest."
- "The Lord ... leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul." (Psalm 23:1-3)
- "God will take care of you."
- "Do not be anxious ... look at the birds." (Matthew 6:25-26)
- "God is with you in this."
- "The Lord shall be your rear guard." (Isaiah 58:8)

A PLAYLIST

What are the songs that bring you joy? It could be the songs that are simply about joy and happiness. And it could be the songs that bring up memories of a moment, concert, parent, place, and so on. They may also be the songs that resonate of the holy for you. Make yourself a playlist. What are the songs that comfort you when you've had a bad day? The songs that reassure when something is really under your skin? Collect those as well.

MEDITATION: SLEEPING IN THE STORM

Matthew 8:24-27 is a good passage to take up in dark and stormy days when you need to remember that Jesus is in the boat with you. After reading the passage slowly, put yourself in this boat. Where do you picture yourself? Can you rest like Jesus? Or are you distressed like the disciples? What would it be like to sleep in a storm? Now picture yourself as a tiny baby cradled by Jesus in that storm. What is that like for you? Talk to Jesus about the feelings and desires this brings up in you. Allow Jesus to hold you in whatever way feels comfortable to you.

THE JESUS PRAYER

This is a simple, beautiful prayer that comes from the Eastern Orthodox tradition. It is found in an anonymous 18th century Russian book called "The Way of the Pilgrim".

Full version: “*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.*”

Short version: “*Lord Jesus, have mercy.*”

In the Orthodox tradition it is prayer repetitively in personal devotion or in worship. It can be a meaningful prayer when you find your mind racing.

SOCIAL MEDIA FAST & RESET

There are many ways that we find freedom from the ever-present pull of social media—drawing us to comparison or worry or judgment of others. For some, Lent is a good opportunity to go offline for 40 days to gain more time to read and pray. For others there might be a weekly sabbath from social media. Still others might fast for a season of focused work on a project to regain energy and margin, to allow the mind to focus. The advantage of taking a break of any length is to give an opportunity for you to check in with yourself and see how you feel with and without social media in your life. There’s no one answer for everyone, but it’s worth looking deeply at the question of whether your social media use is bringing you joy. And then, to get the full benefit of the fast, reset how you engage social media.

THOUGHT RHYMING

Follow the pattern below to write out your own thought rhyme picturing God speaking to you in the following five ways. Begin where you are right now, writing down what you hear from God.

- **I can see you.** Hagar says, “You are the God who sees me” (Genesis 16:13). *Describe where you are and what you are feeling right now.*
- **I can hear you.** Of the son she is carrying, the angel says, “You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard your misery” (Genesis 16:11). *Continue writing to yourself in God’s voice. What is God hearing in your inner thoughts? Are you judging yourself? Is your breathing shallow or deep? Are you excited? Afraid?*
- **I can understand how hard this is for you.** When we look at Hagar’s situation we are likely to feel compassion for her. However, we often deny ourselves permission to receive comfort for the seemingly small moments of pain. We do this to ourselves and others. *Write out your words of compassion and understanding from God to you.*
- **I am glad to be with you.** In Hagar’s story we see God take the initiative to approach her in the form of an angel. Whether what’s bothering us is from an external cause or a result of our own error, God is never repelled from us. God always wants us to come near and offer healing and presence. *What do you sense God offering you?*
- **I can do something for you.** The angel of the Lord offers a promise to Hagar: “I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count” (Genesis 16:10). God also tells Hagar to return to her mistress—a very hard thing. God always offers presence. And there are other good gifts around us as well. *How will God be with you and help you?*

REMINDER CARDS

Select about 3-5 meaningful Scripture verses or God’s messages—words that God is speaking to you. Write each verse on one side of a small card (2 x 3 or 3 x 5 inches works well). On the reverse write a brief phrase or message to yourself with empathy. Express your thoughts as you would speak to a friend. For example, “It’s okay for you to feel this way.” Try using “seeing” language, imagining a friend who knows and loves you no matter what. If you wish, add images using collage (you can cut pictures from a magazine or print some out) or your own illustration to create something that encourages you.

BODY SCAN

Take a moment to check in with your body head to toe. Close your eyes and pay attention to your scalp, face, neck, shoulders, arms, fingers, torso, thighs, calves, feet, and toes. Where do you feel pain? Let it go. Tiredness? Invite God to fill you up. Notice your breathing. What's it like? Take a few deep breaths and let them out. This is a practice you can pick up several times a day just to check in with yourself and how you are feeling.

LITURGICAL PRAYER

Finding some liturgical prayers that are meaningful to you and praying them regularly will help imbed those words in your mind, offering sustenance for difficult times. These prayers become our words when we have no words. The beauty of these prayers can also add joy to each ordinary day. You might want to make a whole-body experience by kneeling as you pray or by lighting a candle to bring in the senses of sight, touch, and smell. You can find the full Book of Common Prayer online at bcponline.org

PRAYING THE PSALMS

It's a wonderful discipline to pray the psalms one by one, as they have many moods. The psalmists remind us that we can bring all of our emotions to God. You might want to try speaking the words aloud as you pray to incorporate the sense of hearing. Here are some psalms for different spiritual and emotional needs. Let the words of the psalms give you freedom to offer your own pain and joy to God.

- Anger: Psalm 55; 140
- Sadness: Psalm 13; 119:81-82
- Anxiety: Psalm 27; 37
- Grief: Psalm 43; 55; 77
- Joy: Psalm 34; 103
- Hate: Psalm 18:16-19

DOODLING PRAYER

You can find resources, including Lenten and Advent templates, at prayingincolor.com A simple way to start is to draw a wavy line and then add leaves large enough for you to write a name. Fill in the leaves with the names of the people you're praying for. Then doodle around the leaves adding color and berries.

WELCOMING PRAYER

In a relaxed posture, breathe deeply, and pray through the following words.

Welcome, welcome, welcome.

I welcome everything that comes to me today because I know it's for my healing.

I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations, and conditions.

I let go of my desire for power and control.

I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval, and pleasure.

I let go of my desire for survival and security.

I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person, or myself.

I open to the love and presence of God
and God's action within. Amen.

BREATH PRAYER

One approach to breath prayer is to state a name of God with an inward breath and then a character quality to match it on the breath out. Here are some examples to begin with:

- Breathe in “Abba”, breathe out “I belong to you”.
- Breathe in “Healer”, breathe out “speak the word and I shall be healed”.
- Breathe in “Shepherd”, breathe out “bring home my lost son”.
- Breathe in “Lord”, breathe out “here I am”.

Choose a prayer and come back to it throughout your day as a reminder that God is near.

TURN IT INTO GRATITUDE

The idea here is to stop ruminating over things by being fully present and thankful for what you are doing. For example, when doing the dishes, say to yourself, “Thank you for these dishes I get to wash because I can feed my family.” This is an effective way to slowly change over those negative mental states, perhaps especially the activities that lead to the “Why am I stuck doing this chore?” internal conversation.

GOD IN THE MUNDANE

Consider the things that bug you on a regular basis—perhaps tasks that are part of your routine. Are there any that you can turn into times for prayer or gratitude or to which you can add an element of fun by playing music or listening to a podcast?

READ A LITTLE

When could you carve out a little reading time for yourself? If you make a regular practice of sitting with a book for just 10-15 minutes, it will start to become routine and your brain will check in quickly and engage the text. You might want to plant books in specific places for yourself so they are available to you within your daily routine.

EATING SLOWLY

Try eating slowly and silently—alone or with others—as a way to become more aware of what food you are taking in. And as a way to offer gratitude for the food that you have—whether a simple meal or an extravagant one.

FIND A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

Consider seeking a spiritual director for yourself. Meetings are typically once a month, and most directors offer a sliding scale of fees so that it's accessible to all. Directors can be found at retreat centers and through Spiritual Directors International (sdiworld.org), Evangelical Spiritual Directors Association (graftedlife.org), and Soul Shepherding (soulshepherding.org/spiritual-directors)

(Adapted from “Be Kind to Yourself”, by Cindy Bunch)