

***Be Kind to Yourself* Reflection and Discussion Guide**

by Cindy Bunch

Welcome to a deepening practice of self-compassion. There are two paths through the book offered here. First, you will find a single-session book discussion group style guide below. There's one question to correlate with each chapter. Following that is a four-session guide, appropriate for individual reflection or group discussion. Each of the four sessions includes a Bible reading along with questions about the book.

Single Session Book Discussion

1. What draws you to the topic of self-kindness?
2. What's the difference between joy and happiness? (Intro)
3. How does noticing beauty help us to notice God's presence? (Ch 1)
4. What is your experience of the inner critic? (pp. 28-29, Ch 2)
5. When there are difficult events in your life or in the lives of those you are close to, what kinds of negative thoughts come up? (Ch 3)
6. On p. 50 there's a reference to a study that found that students who spent less time on social media experienced more positive well-being. Why do you think this is the case? (Ch 4)
7. Hagar says, "You are the God who sees me" (Genesis 16:13). How does this relate to your own do experience of God? (Ch 5)
8. What are your essential self-care practices? (Ch 6)
9. What experiences have you had of art connecting you with God or opening you to new insights? (Ch 7)
10. How is forgiving others a part of a practice of self-kindness? (Ch 8)
11. Brené Brown writes, "Regret can be the birthplace of empathy" (p. 105). How might this concept point the way to greater self-kindness? (Ch 9)
12. What's a small daily habit that might help you to grow in gratitude even in the midst of difficult or dull things? (See pp. 108-10, Ch 10)
13. How can the Enneagram be helpful as a tool for developing compassion for others and compassion for yourself? (Ch 11)
14. As you reflect on the topics explored in chapter twelve, what do you wish that you had more time to do?

Four Session Guide for Individuals or Groups

These sessions are designed to for a group session of about an hour.

If you have time for an eight-week group experience, one path through the book would be to alternate between these discussion sessions and additional practice sessions. For the practice sessions you could ask group members to try out two or three of the practices out between the discussion sessions and then process during the group gathering. Or you could try out one or two of the practices together.

Session One: Introduction and Chapter One

1. What draws you to the topic of self-kindness?
2. What's the difference between joy and happiness?
3. Read Mark 12:28-31. Note that our first calling is to love the Lord with heart, soul, mind, and strength. Do you find that some of these areas of your relationship with God are more a focus for you than others?
4. Mark 12:31 emphasizes the love of neighbor as yourself. In your view how does greater compassion for others lead to greater compassion for yourself? (See also pp. 4-5.)
5. If you have practiced the examen (pp. 5-8), what has your experience of that been like? If not, what internal attraction or resistance do you have in regard to this practice?
6. What are some things that come to mind when you think about what brings you joy?
7. What frustrates you on a daily basis?
8. In chapter one in a discussion of recording our joys, the author says, "Gratitude leads to more gratitude" (p. 17). How have you found this to be true?
9. Dallas Willard said, "Beauty is goodness made manifest to the senses" (p. 17). Share an experience from your life in which you had a sense of God's presence in beauty.
10. A reflective walk can also include noticing places of dissonance and ugliness (p. 22). Have you ever had an experience of sensing God or perhaps a message from the Holy Spirit in the midst of something that is unattractive to you?
11. What are some ways that you are noticing beauty around you?
12. How do you (and could you) cultivate beauty in your life?
13. What are some ways that you would like to further invest in the experience of beauty?

Session Two: Chapters Two Through Four

1. What are you noticing so far about what frustrates you?
2. What sorts of things are you most likely to find churning on a negative mental loop in your head?
3. What is your experience of the inner critic (pp. 28-29)?
4. How would your mental conversation shift if you were to speak to yourself as you speak to your friends?
5. How do you discern the difference between the false voice of the inner critic and a true awareness of your own sin or failure?
6. How can confession be a part of a practice of self-kindness?
7. When there are difficult events in your life or in the lives of those you are close to, what kinds of negative thoughts come up?
8. Read Matthew 8:23-27. Jesus had been teaching and healing people in a large crowd and then he and the disciples departed into the boat when the storm came up. Jesus rebukes the disciples and then calms the storm. How do you relate to the disciples in this passage?
9. What new approaches to anxious or worrisome thoughts would you like to take up? (See ideas in chapter 3 or expand with further ideas.)
10. What do you see as your own responsibility to either speak up or to “stay out of it” in regard to social media?
11. How do you manage engagement with friends who have different views from your own on social media?
12. On p. 50 there’s a reference to a study that found that students who spent less time on social media experienced more positive well-being. Why do you think this is the case?
13. How are you managing your social media and email engagement?
14. As you reflect on these chapters, what ways come to mind that you want make space for more joy in your life?

Session Three: Chapters Five Through Eight

1. When someone says something negative or hurtful to you, do you internalize the comments or are you able to set them aside? What is your mental process like?
2. Read Genesis chapter 16. Describe Hagar's situation when she is in the wilderness.
3. What would it have been like for her to hear these promises from the angel for her son?
4. Hagar says, "You are the God who sees me" (v. 13). How do you experience God seeing you?
5. What reminds you of God's love (pp. 62-67)? Do you have an objects or images or key verses that encourage you?
6. What's different about the experience of frustration and joy when you are grieving (p. 69)?
7. What are your essential self-care practices (p. 70)?
8. How do you distract yourself in ways that often feel unproductive in the end? (See p. 80)
9. What are healthy distractions for you?
10. When your mind wanders during prayer, how do you manage your thoughts?
11. What experiences have you had of art connecting you with God or opening you to new insights?
12. Reflecting on chapter 8, when have you found it hard to forgive?
13. How is forgiving others a part of a practice of self-kindness?
14. Consider the things that have been bugging you lately. Our mental state has so much to do with our experience of self-compassion and our ability to connect with God. What new practice or act of self-compassion might help you wherever you are in life right now?

Session Four: Chapters Nine Through Twelve

1. What are the signs you have observed in your life that you are over-scheduling a day or a month or more?
 2. What helps you to slow down?
 3. Brené Brown writes, “Regret can be the birthplace of empathy” (p. 105). How might this concept point the way to greater self-kindness?
 4. What are you most likely to put off? What are the chores that you find wearisome to do?
 5. What are you learning about yourself by giving more attention to the things that are bugging you?
 6. What’s a small daily habit that might help you to grow in gratitude even in the midst of the difficult or dull things? (See pp. 108-10)
 7. Do you know your Enneagram number? If so, what connections do you make between what bugs you and what brings you joy and the Enneagram? (Ch 11)
 8. How can the Enneagram be helpful as a tool for developing compassion for others and compassion for yourself?
 9. Read *The Message* version of Matthew 11:28-30: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” What words and phrases stand out to you in this message from Jesus?
 10. What personal invitation to self-kindness do you sense in this passage?
 11. As you reflect on the topics explored in chapter twelve, what do you wish that you had more time to do?
 12. What would it take for you to make more time for the things that bring you joy?
- Closing: Read the verses from *The Message* again as a closing prayer inviting us into self-kindness through life with Jesus.