

Retreat Day
Learning to Speak Kindly to Ourselves

“Self-transformation is always preceded by self-acceptance.”

David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*



Content adapted from *Be Kind to Yourself* by Cindy Bunch © 2020 and used by permission of @InterVarsity Press, www.ivpress.com.

Welcome!

I believe that God longs for us to show ourselves the same level of love and compassion that God has shown us through Christ. This flexible retreat guide is more than enough material for a half-day retreat, so make a whole day of it if that's available to you.

As you explore the theme of self-kindness, pray and choose what you are drawn to out of the retreat guide. You don't need to do it all! It's okay to just rest. Or go for a walk. And it's also okay to be bored. Sometimes that's when God gets through to us. Enjoy the day and pursue the material at your own pace.

Here's a possible schedule for a half-day with a group.

Retreat Schedule

8:30-9:00 – Group gathering and opening

9:00-12:00 – Silent retreat

12:00-12:30 – Closing conversation and reflection

I pray that this experience is a gift of self-kindness in your life.

Cindy Bunch

Instagram @cindy.bunch

For more resources visit www.cindybunch.com

Opening: How Do You Talk to Yourself?

(Chapter two of *Be Kind to Yourself*)

That was an unkind thing to say.

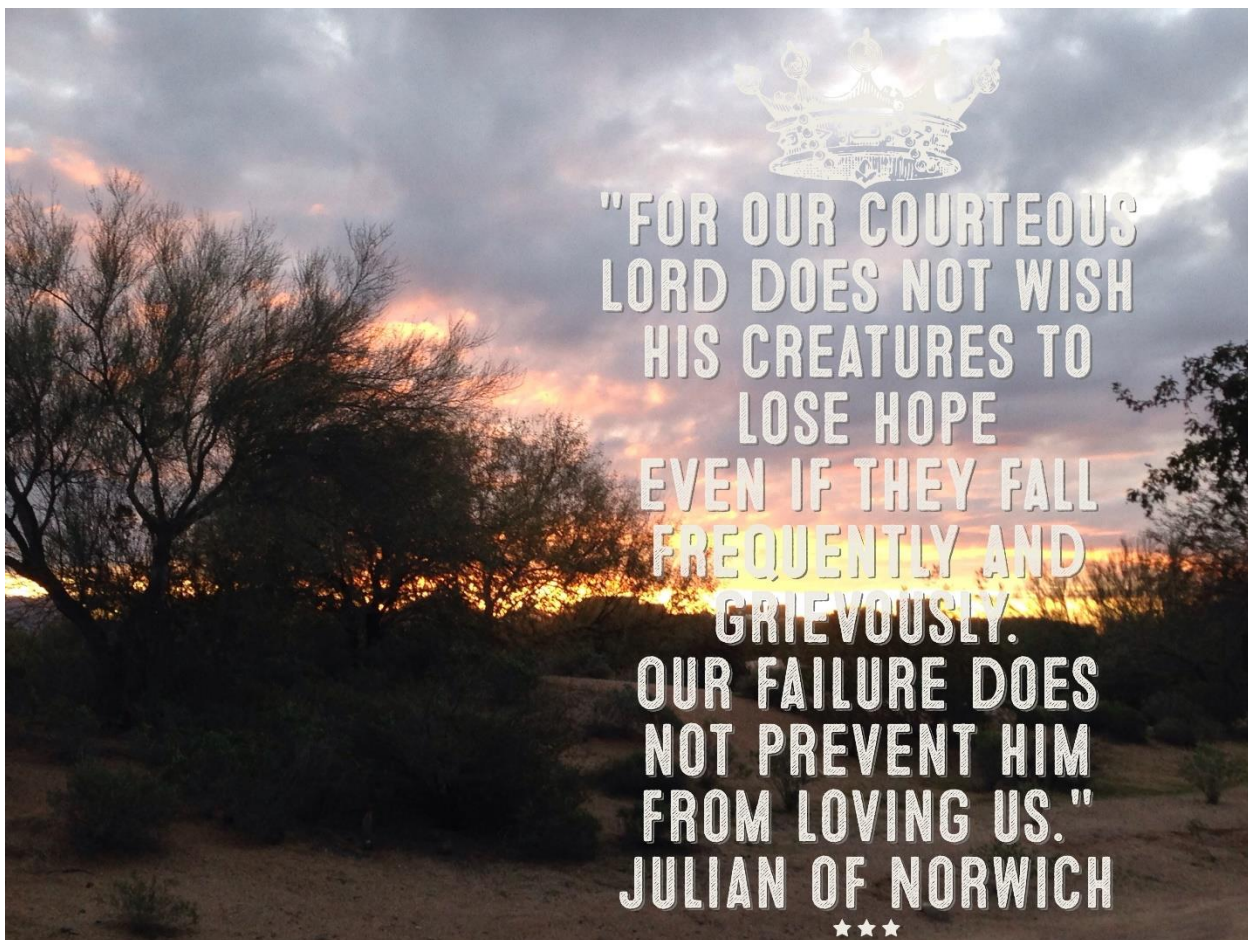
That was a dumb idea.

Why can't you be more patient?

How could you forget to do that?

Why are you so judgmental toward others?

These are some of things I say to myself – virtually on a daily basis. I never (ok, rarely) say such things to others. And certainly not on multiple times a day. And, yet: I've got an inner critic issuing a steady stream of these self-directed comments. I can get so busy beating myself up that it makes it difficult sometimes to differentiate between actions that are a part of living in a human body on this earth (forgetting my keys) and actions that cause harm to others (loudly expressing impatience for slow service at a restaurant).



"Our courteous Lord does not want his creatures to lose hope even if they fail frequently and grievously. Our failure does not prevent him from loving us." Julian of Norwich

The first step is to realize that many of us are stuck in this sort of negative cycle of self-judgement. We've been leasing an apartment in our brains to this inner critic for too many years. It could be a life-long pattern. It could be that it's a cycle that you learned as you internalized the voice of a parent or a teacher or a pastor early in your life. It could be that it is still reinforced by someone in your life who tells you negative things about yourself.

When you find yourself lapsing into negativity, what do you say to yourself?

Practice: Journaling and Self-Kindness

(p. 39, *Be Kind to Yourself*)

Spend 15 or so minutes doing a written brain dump. Put it all out there.

What are you saying to yourself? Are you able to be gracious and kind to yourself? When does it happen readily and when is it difficult?

What's distracting you today? Write out all the random thoughts and concerns in your head.

What are you feeling right now? Get in touch with your emotions and write those out as well. Keep writing until nothing more comes.

What do you notice about how you come to the day?

What do you notice about what is on your mind?

Practice: Make a List

(p. 28, *Be Kind to Yourself*)

Marilyn McEntyre has a wonderful book by the title *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 ideas could be

Ways I Can Be Kind to Myself

The Keys to Self-Kindness Are...

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!

Practice: Words of Comfort

(pp. 28 and 65, *Be Kind to Yourself*)

This moment of self-criticism you noticed might be a signal of something deeper going on. What do you need right now? Offer yourself some words of comfort. Remind yourself that the critic is not to be trusted in these moments.

As you become more aware of the inner critic, develop some mental patterns for your response when the negative thoughts surface. 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 at hand for yourself.

Here in the "Make a List" format are some words of comfort that I have written on reminder cards for myself. I have phrased it as I would speak to a friend, and then included meaningful Scripture references that affirm the truth behind these words.

God want 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

Be good to yourself.

"God is . . . the source of all comfort." 2 Corinthians 1:3



Practice: The Liturgy of Confession

Sometimes the inner critic has a good point! Consider whether you do hold responsibility for wrongdoing and whether anything you need to do to make it right. Do that.

One of the meaningful aspects of the liturgical tradition for me is having a time for confession each week. In many churches this portion is in a kneeling position – which I find to be a helpful engagement of the body with the spirit. We can pray this prayer on our own as well as in community as we name our sins before God.

The Deacon or Celebrant says

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

Silence may be kept.

Minister and People

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

In the worship liturgy after the corporate time of confession, the Priest says:

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins
through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all
goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in
eternal life. *Amen.*

If you need to hear these words today, read them aloud and know that in Christ there is grace for all of us.

Practice: The Gaze of Love

In Luke 7 we read of Jesus' encounter with a widow as he enters the town of Nain with a crowd of followers. The widow's dead son is being carried out and there are crowds with her. It sounds like an overwhelming mass of people converging.

When Jesus saw the widow we are told that he "had compassion on her." The text continues:

Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. (Lk 7:11-17 ESV)

In a contemporary image of the scene, a 2018 oil painting depicting a coffin being carried out, the widow looks out at the viewer of the painting. As we meet her gaze, we see the pain on the widow's face. We don't see Jesus in this image but we can imagine him gazing back toward her. Allow it to help you imagine yourself in this scene in the meditation below.

You can view the image here:

<https://www.moddermanbiblicalart.com/widow-of-nain.html>

and on page 93 of *Be Kind to Yourself*.

Meditation: Meeting Jesus' Gaze

Picture yourself in this scene of people. You might choose to place yourself as an onlooker, a pallbearer, or as the widow, or as the dead son.

What do you see, hear, feel?

Look at Jesus. What is it like to make eye contact with him?

What does Jesus want from you?

What is Jesus offering you?

Now step back from this encounter with Jesus and look to God. What is your sense of how God sees you?

Is there any difference in how you picture Jesus' gaze and God's gaze? If so, why do you think this is?

Sit with all that has come to you. Ask God reveal the gaze of love to you now and in the coming days and weeks.

Practice: A Visio Divina Walk

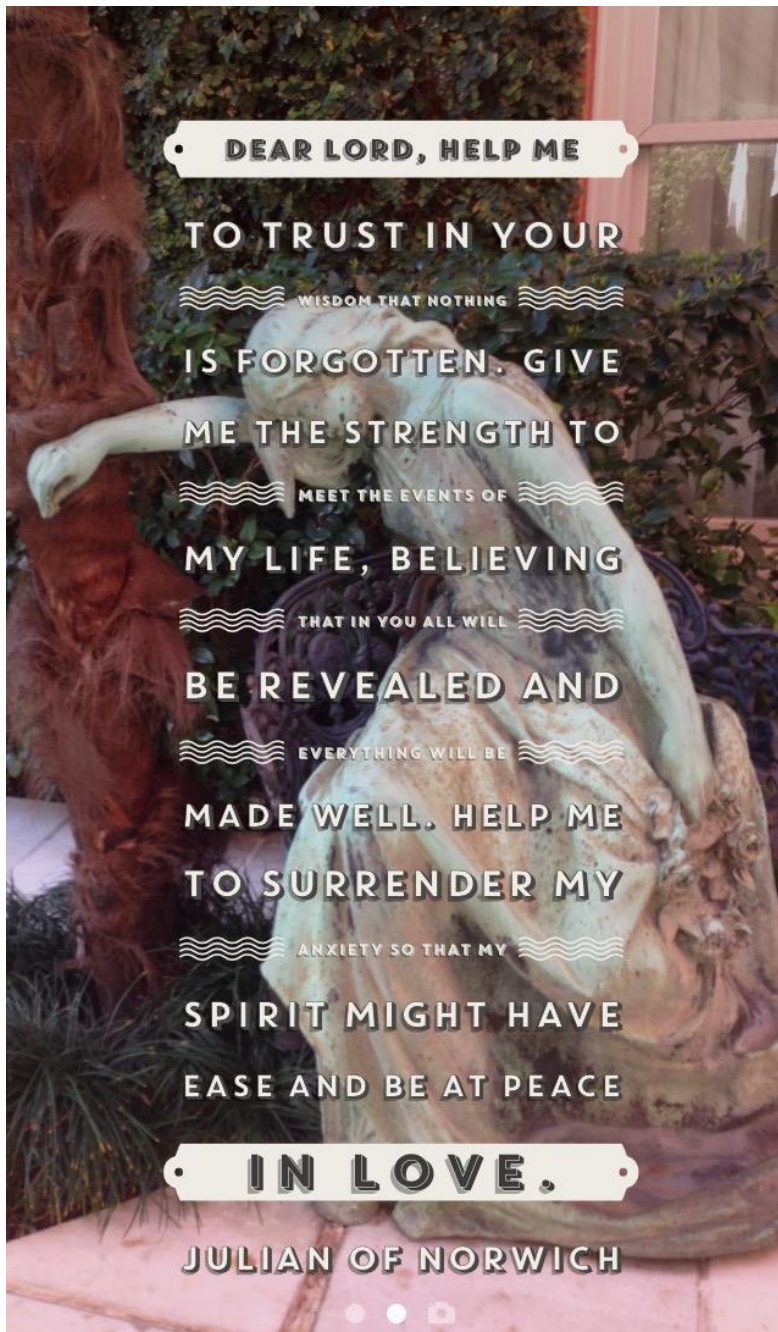
(chap 1, *Be Kind to Yourself*)

I first learned about the idea of photography as a form of lectio divina (divine reading) called “visio divina” or divine vision from Christine Valters Paintner.¹ Visio divina 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. Or maybe it’s ugly. Watch your inner response. Both attraction and repulsion can be cues that there’s something more. I like to take three to five of these images and sit with them. Sometimes I combine them in a photo collage. Then journal about the experience. What do you sense from the Holy Spirit? How do these images speak to you?

Closing

Julian of Norwich (b. 1342) is a saint for our day. She lived through plague, illness, and political unrest. To close your time read her words as a blessing on your life and your ongoing self-kindness journey.



¹ Visit abbeyofthearts.com. Also see her book *Eyes of the Heart: Photography as a Christian Contemplative Practice*, 2013, Sorin Books.