

# WEEK TWO • DAY ONE

## FOCUSING ON YOUR MIND AND THOUGHTS

[DECEMBER 9-15]

# +shhhh

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.  
[Luke 5:16 \(NIV\)](#)

## SEEKING SOLITUDE

**Samantha Wooten** [Summerville, South Carolina]

**T**echnology provides a constant stream of distractions, all vying for our attention. Even when I take time to read my Bible, I often feel rushed or unfocused, knowing that a call or text may soon demand attention.

I wonder how Jesus would get away to pray in our day. I imagine he would leave his laptop behind and go to a quiet place with no cell service. And I doubt he would take selfies to post later.

If the Son of God needed time away from the demands of his ministry, how much more do I need solitude? Quiet moments not only strengthen my spiritual life, but also allow me to refresh and refuel before returning to the rush of my everyday routine. When is the last time you unplugged and spent some quiet time with God? <

**the pursuit of silence:** My brain was not designed to focus on more than one thing at a time. When I want to talk with God or listen for God's voice, I have to silence myself just as I silence my phone. Often, I reach for earplugs to help me block out distractions and focus on being with God. In our noise-filled society, silence is a pursuit. Fitting it into each day takes discipline, but silence before God is worth the effort.

**Meagan Briggs** [Broken Arrow, Oklahoma]



# WEEK TWO • DAY TWO

## NEGATIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS

BLAME GAME

WEEKEND!

# BLAME, REVENGE, FORGIVENESS

When I was four years old, my older brother and sister and I shared a bedroom. My brother was pretty cool; he was eleven, liked Pac-Man, and played croquet with me. My sister was in a whole different realm; she was a teenager. One evening, she was out roller skating and I was in our bedroom looking for a toy, when my sister perpetrated the most horrendous act imaginable. I screamed in pain and looked down; a pushpin from her bulletin board had inadvertently been left on the floor and was now protruding from my bleeding foot. I blamed her. No, I hated her.



46 JULY>AUGUST 2016

august 8-14

# WEEK TWO • DAY TWO

## NEGATIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS

BLAME GAME

WEEKEND!

After treating the wound and soothing my sobs, my mother left me to my own devices, which may have been a mistake since I began to hatch a plot. Later, my mother walked in as I was crouching in front of my sister's bed. I had pulled all of her pushpins out of the bulletin board and was lining them up, sharp side up, in front of her bed.

"What are you doing?" Mom asked, appalled at my vindictive behavior.

Nonchalantly, I replied, "I want her to know how it feels."

Four years old, and already I'd had a taste of resentment and blame. I wanted my suffering to be noticed; and I wanted an eye for an eye, a pushpin for a pushpin. My sister needed to know what she had done, even if she hadn't meant to—and she needed to pay for it.

How often do we blame other people and hold on to anger until it burns inside of us, making us sick, driving us crazy, and putting tremendous pressure and stress on our lives? How can we, instead, offer a response that is different from "an eye for an eye" or "I'm going to put tacks around your bed so you will know how it feels"? We pray for them; and we pray for us to stop blaming, to take responsibility for our actions, to do what is right from now on, and to pave the way for reconciliation.

When we say The Lord's Prayer, we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." If we forgive others as freely as God forgives us, we can all become more like Christ, for we learn how to love and forgive by being loved and forgiven. <

Stephanie Salisbury [Middlebury, Indiana]

### 14 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Looking at the world and laying blame for its problems is easy. We see the blame game played almost everywhere we go—among our families, our friends, our leaders. Instead of trying to fix the problems in the world, we spend our time trying to decide who's to blame for them. Both sides think the other side is wrong. We pass around guilt because we don't want to bear the responsibility. We can't admit that maybe we're at fault. Telling ourselves that someone else is to blame for all our troubles is much easier. Yet, fighting about who is wrong doesn't get us anywhere. It only wastes time and halts any progress we could make toward a solution. In the end, what matters is not who is to blame but whether we are willing to recognize the problem and move toward a solution. **Will you be the one to stop blaming and to start working toward reconciliation?**

Wesley Overhults [Lexington, Kentucky]

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# WEEK TWO • DAY THREE

## NEGATIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS

### THE SKIN YOU'RE IN

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV)

### CAPTIVATING 25

Rebecca Gertner [Sacramento, California]

When I walk into a room, I quickly notice who is prettier than I am, who has better clothes or nicer hair, who's more popular. Unfortunately, I have to fight on a regular basis my inclination to make comparisons. When I didn't fight it, I was discontent with everything about me. I had compared myself to so many movie stars and real-life "pretty people" that my vision had become distorted. I could no longer see reality. I only saw myself lacking.

Our thoughts can destroy us. What we think is not always true. I was allowing the world's definition of pretty to make me think I was ugly.

When I decided to take my thoughts captive and to be grateful every day, my whole world changed. Now, I try not to judge myself and others by making comparisons. Instead, I choose to see each one of us as a unique and special creation of a loving God. <



**SEE THE TRUTH:** Lies come in many forms: doubt, fear, despair, disappointment, insecurity, and hopelessness, to name a few. Negative thoughts and feelings keep us from being everything God created us to be. Instead, let's move forward in life, trusting that we are beautiful in God's eyes. Don't buy the lies. Keep your faith.

Julie Hoy [Salem, Oregon]



Listen to Julie Hoy's "Don't Buy the Lies" at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzNgbzD0PBM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzNgbzD0PBM)

february 24–28

JAN>FEB 2014 **59**

# WEEK TWO • DAY FOUR

## NEGATIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS

YOU-NIQUE

WEEKEND!



TYNEA LEWIS

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# PLEASE LOVE ME

As a freshman in college, I developed an eating disorder. Looking back, I can see the first signs. Even in high school, I watched what I ate, I felt fat after eating certain foods, and I felt insecure in certain outfits.

### COMPARISONS AND CONTROL

In my college years, when everything was new and I grappled for control, I ate too little and exercised too much. My desire to be healthy quickly spiraled out of control when I

compared myself to others and didn't measure up: *He's smarter. She's prettier. He's more athletic. She has all the guys chasing her.* When a guy I had become interested in didn't feel the same way about me, I controlled what I ate to

make myself feel better, hoping that being more attractive would gain his approval. When school assignments overwhelmed me, I went to the gym and ran for hours. Diet and exercise were ways for me to take control. Slowly,

18 MAR>APR 2015

march 9-15

# WEEK TWO • DAY FOUR

## NEGATIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS

YOU-NIQUE

WEEKEND!

I began isolating myself from my friends because they started commenting on the changes they saw; and I didn't want to keep defending my choices, so I avoided hanging out with them. My time was spent focusing on how to be thin, which I thought would bring happiness. Instead, it brought pain, confusion, and broken relationships.

### TRUTH

I started to believe that the only way I could earn someone's love was to be thin. If I didn't run as much as I wanted or if I ate too much, I felt like a failure. I let the world determine how I saw myself. Yet, no matter how much I turned away, God continued to pursue me. God used scripture and other people to speak truth into my life. I didn't want to hear the

truth. I wanted to deny that I had a problem, but I couldn't run from it any longer. God wanted me to see what I was doing to myself and to the relationships that were once important to me.

For quite some time, I convinced myself that I didn't have an eating disorder because I had never dropped below 100 pounds. But I learned that eating disorders are more than weight lost. They're a mindset. I was consumed, living in bondage.

### LEARNING TO BE ME

Recovery was a long journey, but God loved me and gave me a support system to lift me up on days when I couldn't do it myself. I'm thankful for the lessons God taught me. I had to stop comparing myself to everyone around

me. I was trying to squeeze myself into a mold I thought others expected of me instead of embracing who I was, the person God wanted me to be. God made me unique. God called me to do something no one else could do. But by allowing myself to be consumed with the way I looked, I didn't allow God to use me to advance the kingdom. My own selfishness got in the way of God's using my life to touch other people. I don't need to be a certain way to earn God's favor. Nothing I can do will make God love me more. I am God's child, already loved more than I can imagine. <

**Tynea Lewis** is a freelance writer who is loving her new role as a stay-at-home mom.

### 15 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Do you find yourself in a battle, searching for your worth? Here are some verses that spoke truth into my life. Take a moment to look them up, and allow God to speak to your heart.

+ James 4:7-8

+ Proverbs 31:30

+ 1 Peter 3:3-4

+ 1 Samuel 16:7

+ Psalm 139:13-16

+ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

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AM I NORMAL?

WEEKEND!



# SELFI COMPASSION

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FRANCESCA BAKER

We all know people we think are great because of their quick mind, kind demeanor, or creativity. But all too often, we take their strengths as an automatic indication of our weaknesses.

Human beings are social creatures. We form groups and seek connections. We look to others for guidance, reassurance, and inspiration. But seeking approval and comparing ourselves to others can lead to self-criticism and negative self-talk. Have you listened to what you say to yourself? Do these comments sound familiar?

- + “Everyone else likes to watch movies rather than read. I’m so weird.”
- + “She didn’t invite me to her party. I’m so unpopular; nobody likes me.”

We are not very nice, are we? Can you imagine making comments like these to another person? Of course not! Negative self-talk hurts, and much of it comes from comparing ourselves to other people or wanting their approval.

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# WEEK TWO • DAY FIVE

## SELF-COMPASSION

AM I NORMAL?

WEEKEND!

God created every one of us different, with positive and beautiful qualities. The strengths of other people do not automatically make us weak. If someone else is clever, you are not inherently less intelligent. If you think differently, you're not wrong or weird. If being normal is being the same as everyone else, then no one is normal, because God made each of us unique.

God, who is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love” (Psalm 103:8, NIV), made each of us in God's image. Therefore, we have the capacity for tenderness and love—toward others and ourselves. Of course, even when we are doing the best we can, we inevitably make mistakes; but being critical of ourselves is no way to celebrate God's gift of life. Knowing that God loves and forgives us, we can learn to love and forgive ourselves—not pretending that nothing has happened, but accepting it and moving on in ways that let us learn from the experience. Being kind to ourselves is not the same as being self-indulgent or avoiding responsibility. It's a way to give ourselves room to grow, without the pressure of doubt and guilt that comes from comparing or approval-seeking.

Everyone has struggles, but often they are hidden. Only you and God know the inner workings of your heart, which no one else can see. The same is true for others as well. You may see someone living an apparently wonderful life and feel sad that your own does not measure up. But how do you know what burdens that person carries inside?

As we seek to be more accepting of others, we must learn to accept ourselves as well. Luke 6:31 (NIV) says, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” What about its flip side? Treat yourself as you would treat others. <

**Francesca Baker** ([www.andsothethinks.co.uk](http://www.andsothethinks.co.uk)) believes the world is full of opportunity and beauty and is passionate about using her gifts of curiosity and creativity to experience it, while keeping attuned to the body, soul, and world she inhabits.

### 31 NEXT DAY STRETCH

For the next 30 days, practice being kind to yourself. Let these ideas help you learn to accept, embrace, and celebrate what makes you unique.

- + Keep a gratitude journal. Every day write three things you are thankful for—one about yourself, one about another person, one about the world.
- + Close your eyes, and bring to mind someone you care about. Offer for him or her this prayer of blessing: “May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be free from worry.” Next, imagine someone you are not close to or someone you dislike. Repeat the blessing, sincerely directing your love toward this person. Finally, visualise yourself. Say to yourself the words of compassion and blessing.
- + Make a list of what you believe about yourself. Explore where each idea comes from. Try to think back to a situation, person, or feeling that may have triggered this belief or reinforced it. Then ask: Is it from God? Is it true? Am I judging myself?

34 JANUARY>FEBRUARY 2016

# WEEK TWO • DAY SIX

## SELF-COMPASSION

I HATE MYSELF

WEEKEND!

ALINA KANASKI

# project 11 loving myself

**Driving home in rush hour traffic is not the greatest time to have an emotional breakdown—but there I was, crying at a stoplight, utterly swamped by the realization that I didn't love myself.**

I didn't hate myself. I just didn't think I was that important or worth it. Other people were—and I would gladly offer a ride or help someone move; but it had never occurred to me that I could like myself and still, deep down, see all of the flaws that made me think I wasn't worth my own care and attention. I had never realized that I didn't feel worth it, and realizing it was devastating.

So I sat down and asked myself a question: *What would loving myself look like?*

When I say *loving myself*, I don't mean feeling great about myself, although that can be a part of love. I mean acting like I love myself, sticking up for me and treasuring myself no matter what, the way I do for the people I love. I mean working toward what is best for me in God's eyes, the same way I would for anyone else I love.

I began to imagine what I would do if I truly loved myself. I wrote down my ideas and formulated goals to work toward. I was sick of not loving myself. I knew that God loves me, even more than I can imagine. I wanted to love myself the way God loves me, the way God calls me to love other people.

**14** NOVEMBER>DECEMBER 2017

november 6–12

# WEEK TWO • DAY SIX

## SELF-COMPASSION

I HATE MYSELF

WEEKEND!

Instead of trying to make huge changes, I intentionally focused on tiny things I could do. Small actions build up over time and are not so overwhelming. With that in mind, I set three specific goals:

**1. Getting to know myself.** How can I love someone I don't know? Journaling helps me to know and to understand myself. I focus on doing things I truly enjoy instead of things I think I should enjoy.

**2. Acting like I love myself.** Love is shown through actions, so I treat myself in ways that are respectful and loving. I exercise more, do what I'm passionate about rather than filling time, and stop calling myself an awful person.

**3. Taking myself seriously.** What are my dreams? Taking myself seriously means pursuing my dreams instead of assuming they are impossible or putting them off because they are difficult. If I take myself seriously, then I am worth some hard work.

I have been working on this project for several months. I'm nowhere near perfect at loving myself and often get pretty frustrated. Facing the bad habits I've cultivated or the things I hate about myself is hard—way harder than ignoring them or putting up with them. I still have days (and weeks) when I ignore my goals because they are difficult. But when I focus on my goals, I begin to feel like I love myself. I'm passionate about the things I love, such as writing. This love flows into the way I treat others; small actions feel more important, and I'm much less likely to be kind only when it's convenient. Loving myself doesn't mean being selfish but searching for the person God created me to be, and a huge part of that is loving others.

I still have a long way to go, but this project has helped me to learn more about myself and to love myself. <

**Alina Kanaski** is a writer, reader, and nature lover who is slowly learning to love herself and relish the small joys of life.

### 12 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Spend some time alone. Consider this question: *How do I feel about myself?* Be honest.

Then ask: *What would it look like to love myself?* Don't think about this question in terms of feelings; instead, think about how you would act toward yourself. Would you act as if you're unimportant? Would you treat yourself badly? ignore the things you love? try to force yourself to be someone you're not?

How can you treat yourself better? How can you act like you love yourself? Be specific; set a goal for yourself.

# WEEK TWO • DAY SEVEN

## SELF-COMPASSION

GOOD ENOUGH?

WEEKEND!

STEVE MATTHEWS

# free to be me

Wouldn't it be great if we "outgrew" the worry associated with measuring up? I haven't been a teen for . . . well . . . a few years, and I still find myself wondering from time to time if I am good enough. I am an East Coast, middle-age, overweight, under-employed

guy. Most of the time I feel OK in my skin. But last week I took my first trip to Los Angeles. Something about going to the land of the perpetually young, the rich and famous, the beautiful people had me feeling insecure.

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# WEEK TWO • DAY SEVEN

## SELF-COMPASSION

### GOOD ENOUGH?

#### WEEKEND!

Fortunately, I have developed some practices that remind me that while I am not perfect, I am good enough in God's eyes. A few years ago I found a few phrases that help me to regroup when I am feeling insecure. One is from humorist Grady Nutt in *Being Me*: "I am a person of worth, created in the image of God to relate and to live." The other is from Psalm 139:14 (NRSV): "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." These truths remind me that there is nothing I can do or not do that will make God love me any less or any more. As I say these words, my shoulders relax and my breathing slows. I am freed to be fully myself, knowing that I may not be perfect but that I am here on this planet to be me . . . and that IS good enough.

I recently read an article in *The New York Times* that talked about the need for developing a sense of self-compassion rather than self-confidence. The article describes self-compassion as the ability to treat ourselves with kindness while acknowledging our imperfections and limitations. This approach can help us to see our abilities objectively, to learn from past mistakes, and to be more empathetic with others. In contrast to a forced self-confidence, self-compassion often leads to a more meaningful sense of worth.

As I was packing for Los Angeles, I tried on some clothes and looked in the mirror. Self-confidence might have led me to say, "Not bad, Matthews. You can do this." But the truth was that I had gained weight and didn't have confidence in the way I looked. Self-compassion reminded me to breathe deep, to accept my flaws, and to be myself: "I am a person of worth, created in the image of God to relate and to live." The power and beauty of me is based in my core, not my surface. I went to LA, had a great time, and felt meaningfully connected to the people I met. ◀

**Steve Matthews** was a youth minister for over 15 years. He is now a consultant and leadership coach working with new church starts and re-developing communities of faith. He is also a spiritual director.

### 28 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Take a few deep breaths, and feel your feet on the ground. Close your eyes, and say the words from *Being Me*: "**I am a person of worth, created in the image of God to relate and to live.**" Hold yourself with all the love and compassion that God holds for you.

Now think about a family member, friend, or acquaintance who seems to be struggling to measure up. This struggle may show up as a poor self-image, or it might appear as arrogance or an exaggerated self-confidence. Hold this person in prayer with this same sense of God's loving compassion. How might you extend compassion to this person?