

Self-Compassion Practice

By Gina Norman

What started out as a question and a quest, turned apology letter to my daughter is now a spiritual exercise on self-compassion for anyone.

Over the last few months, I started to wonder about self-compassion. I had heard it mentioned in some circles around the internet and was very curious. Like me, self-compassion has not been on your radar most of your life. Yet, it seems like one of the most important elements of life. Self-compassion and “self-love” is something we aren’t taught specifically. We certainly weren’t taught this in church.

How could that be? Especially because when Jesus is asked in the gospel of Matthew, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?,” Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor *as yourself*.” Matthew 22:36-39

Come again?

Have churches conveniently ignored this part of the verse? Has this last part of the verse gotten twisted into a “self-love” concept being perceived as selfish? I think so. I think it’s a strong possibility that the last part of that verse has gotten forgotten because no one has known how to preach about it. In my experience, “self-love” has been looked down upon in evangelical circles because it’s been mistaken for vanity.

Upon contemplation of this verse and the lack of compassion I have for myself, it made me realize that I wished I had taught my daughter more intentionally how to show herself compassion and love. Wow, what a game-changer that would have been for her. What a game-changer self-compassion can be for all of us. Being kind to oneself can seem unnatural and cumbersome.

I googled, (because I legit did not know what it meant), “What is self-compassion”? Here’s the answer I got:

“Self-compassion is simply the process of turning compassion inward. We are kind and understanding rather than harshly self-critical when we fail, make mistakes, or feel inadequate. We give ourselves support and encouragement rather than being cold and judgmental when challenges and difficulty arise in our lives.”

Wait one second, I can be nice to myself? I can treat myself the way I treat Being compassionate toward others has come fairly easy for me most of my life. But compassion toward myself? Forget it. That concept has never fit into my life equation.

Through my ponderings and research, *I realized that I have been mean to myself most of my life. And I realized that it was because others were mean to me first.*

Being mean to myself was learned. I learned the practice of being unkind to myself. Keyword: learned. This meant I could unlearn being mean to myself and try self-compassion. Doing so would not be easy but I believe this new path would be worth it. Because when others treat me well, I do better and feel better. So if I treat myself better, the effects should be the same. Eventually.

If we believe we love a compassionate God, then it would be good and healthy to follow suit - meaning, we can extend compassion and love to others **and** ourselves! But how do we start after tearing ourselves down for so long?

I hope this practice will help you get started on the path to being gentler, kinder, and more understanding, patient, and loving toward yourself.

Self-Compassion Exercise

Take a moment and settle into where you are. Take a look around at your surroundings and just take notice. If it feels good, take note of two objects in the room that feel grounding. Next, feel your body in the space you're in. Feel the support of whatever is holding you up. Get as comfortable as you'd like, either laying down or sitting.

When you feel ready, take a few deep belly breaths. Breathe in through your nostrils and out through your nostrils, letting the exhale be longer than the inhale. Take as much time as you need. You'll know when you're ready because you'll feel more relaxed.

Notice how you feel so far.

Now, imagine you are at a park, or in a meadow, whatever feels good. You could even imagine being in the mountains or at the sea. But imagine a bench there and another you across from you on the bench. Yes, another you!

Imagine you are looking at her/he/them, (you), sit here for a minute just to take this in.

As you are looking at yourself, note any feelings that pop up without judgment. Go ahead and let that go now. No room for judging here, just be present.

Next, as you're looking at yourself, bring to mind how you treat them. That's right. (my guess is that you don't treat yourself super kindly or with compassion) Sit here for a moment. Just observing that thought.

Next, think about what you think of them on a daily basis. Think about the things you say to them on a daily basis. In what ways do you communicate and talk to you? Be here as long as you need to and note what's coming up for you. Spend some time here.

Once you've imagined this, take a few minutes to reflect on *how you feel and how the other you might feel* after treating and being treated this way. If it feels good to journal, go ahead and do that. Take your time.

Next, spend some time imagining how having compassion on you, might look/be. Practice showing them compassion. Remember, compassion is kindness, gentleness, understanding, empathy, and love. Or, however you feel best expressing compassion to yourself, do that. Take note of how this experience is feeling.

When you're ready, think about how showing compassion to them is versus not. Compare the differences.

After that, reflect overall on what your experience was like, how you felt, and how they might have felt in the experience.

Finally, how did showing yourself compassion feel? What surprised you? Was it easy? What felt difficult? What did you like about the exercise?

Why do you think you lack self-compassion and self-love? In what ways can you learn to practice these in your day-to-day life?

Anything else?

How To Do Self-Compassion And Self-Love

1. Comfort your body. Eat something healthy. Or eat something that would feel good to you, maybe even a treat.
2. Write a letter to yourself. Think of a situation that caused you to feel pain. Write yourself like you would a friend who was hurting.
3. Give yourself encouragement.
4. Make a list of all the areas in life you're doing well.
5. Make a list of all the great things about yourself.
6. Practice mindfulness. Keep bringing yourself back to the present moment.
7. Talk yourself through something like you would a friend.
8. Remember God's love toward you. Let that be an encouragement of how you could treat yourself. God is love.
9. Say nice things to yourself, especially if you are triggered by something that is creating hurtful feelings. Something simple like, "I am loved", "I am ok", "I am safe", "I'm doing such a good job in life, the best I can" etc...
10. Repeating to yourself that you are enough. The world makes us think that we aren't thin enough, rich enough, smart enough, creative enough, and on and on, but with that lens, we will never be enough. We are ENOUGH NOW.

Create your own ideas of self-compassion and self-love. Repeat.

