



Give Yourself the Gift of Kindness

■ by Joy Bocanegra, MA, LCPC

The “Oughts” live close by and keep inviting themselves in. The patriarch of the family, Regret, showed up after a recent visit from my grandchildren. “I ought to have” ... “if only I had” ... “why didn’t I” ... a barrage of criticism assaulted me for days, and I felt lousy. I felt like I hadn’t done enough. Finally realizing that Regret isn’t good company, I ushered him to the door.

I struggle with wanting everything to be just right. I hold myself to a high standard and often forget that, as a human being, I am limited, and I am not going to think of everything or get it exactly right. The beginning of 1 Corinthians 13:4 says, “Love is patient and kind...” Beating myself up with regret isn’t loving or kind.

So, how do we show kindness to ourselves? One way is to notice how you treat yourself. Do you put too much pressure on yourself or hold yourself to unreasonable expectations, like expecting yourself to be all things to all people? Do you lose sight of the fact that, in our humanness, we make mistakes?

Treating yourself with kindness is a gift you can give yourself. Here are some ways to be kind to yourself:

- Speak kindly to yourself. Your self-talk makes a difference.
- Forgive yourself when you mess up. And we all do.
- Accept limitations. Remember, in our humanness, we are limited in what we can do. We need to let God be God and rest in him.
- Take one thing at a time. When you are overwhelmed, break your tasks into small, manageable pieces.
- Make space in your day and your week to rest and restore your soul.
- Give yourself grace as you go through the day. Don’t worry about small things.
- Notice what makes life good. Gratitude helps keep us balanced and brings joy. Little things count! A delicious cup of coffee and the color purple are two things that help make my life good, and I am grateful.

- Continued on Page 2 -

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- Continued from Page 1 -

As the holidays approach, stress is amplified. Too much on our to-do list, hectic schedules, financial pressure, and navigating a “not-so-typical” holiday celebration amidst COVID-19 can leave you ready to crack. Give yourself the gift of kindness as you navigate the holidays. Implementing the following tools can help:

Simplify – Scale down what you do. Reassess your traditions, and think about what is important to you and your family. Ask your family what matters to them, and give yourself permission to eliminate things.

Accept what is out of your control – Life is full of unexpected surprises and things we cannot control. Rather than waste your energy fighting something you cannot change, accept the reality of what is. COVID-19 may change who joins you for holiday celebrations or how you celebrate. While we will miss the loved ones we can't be with, making the most of things and finding creative alternatives can help us.

Practice good self-care – Good self-care is essential all year round but even more so during the holidays and other especially stressful times. Be attentive to your body, mind, and spirit. Rest, play, laugh, reflect, journal, exercise, color, dance, stretch, get plenty of sleep, take a walk outside, be in the moment.

Be attentive to goodness and beauty – Tune in to the sights, sounds, and smells. Allow yourself to linger over a delicious cup of hot spiced cider, an orchestra or Christmas choir, the snap and crackle of a bright, warm fire in the fireplace, or the vision of sparkling, white, fresh fallen snow. These moments help us tune in to the present moment and relax. Goodness and beauty help restore our soul as we breathe them in.

As you think of gifts for your loved ones, remember to love yourself with the gift of kindness. And if the “Oughts” show up at your door, send them packing. It is far better to sit with Jesus and let him remind you that you are loved. ■



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