

# A Change of Mind

by Carrie Noennig

## What is Self-Talk?

Self-talk is the internal conversation we have with ourselves. It's that little voice inside that acts like a radio announcer, broadcasting opinions about everything we do. And, like a radio, we can choose what we want to listen to. We have the power to tune out the stations we don't want to listen to and to pick those we like.

Self-talk can be either positive or negative. Negative self-talk cuts you down, and it usually isn't based on truth or reality. Positive self-talk tells the truth in a loving, encouraging way. If you make a mistake, positive self-talk doesn't deny it but rather breathes hope into your heart that you'll learn from it. It equips you with confidence to become all that God designed you to be.

I was an expert at negative self-talk during my high school years. I'd get a good grade on a test and think, You did OK, but still missed 10 questions. Next time you can do better. If I said something I thought was stupid during a conversation, I'd mentally beat myself up.



## Why Does it Matter?

Self-talk isn't just personal commentary on a day's event. Our emotional states and our self-talk are directly linked, each affecting the other. Our self-talk shapes how we see ourselves, and this affects how we interact with other people.

Dr. Judith Pearson, a licensed professional counselor, says, "Your self-talk can influence your self-esteem, outlook, energy level, performance, and relationship with others. It can even affect your health."

The way we were raised affects how we talk to ourselves. Our parents may have practiced negative self-talk, and we may have learned it from them. Sarah Collins, a licensed psychologist, says negative self-talk

is a pattern. "We don't naturally come out of the womb wanting to kick ourselves. Kicking ourselves when we are down is not an inherent, natural human reaction."

Negative self-talk is self-destructive. Pearson says it "is usually a mixture of half-truths, poor logic and distortion of reality" that lead to feelings of "pessimism, guilt, fear and anxiety." Put simply, negative self-talk pushes us into activities that don't please God.

He commands us to cast all our anxiety on Him (Philippians 1:4-6; Peter 5:7) and not to be afraid (Isaiah 41:10; Joshua 1:9)

There's a lot at stake when we use self-talk to bash ourselves. Besides leading me into worry and fear, my negative self-talk has hindered my walk with God in

other ways. What Jesus says in Mark 12:31 still catches my attention every time I read it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." I focused on "love your neighbor" part for years before really seeing the last two words. The truth is that we're incapable of loving others unless we have a healthy love and respect for ourselves. We can't reach out to others unless we ourselves are filled with Christ and His love. But also by serving others, we take the focus off ourselves and our negative feelings. Each half of the verse feeds the other.

**"Nice job. You blew it again."**

**"Why you are such a jerk?"**

**"You'll never get it right!"**

**"Man, that was stupid!"**

**"You're a complete failure."**

Do you make statements like these? Who are you talking to?

You're probably not talking to other people; you're probably talking to yourself. We learned the importance of saying nice things to others during childhood, when we took to heart Thumper's advice to Bambi: "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." This advice seems practical for relationships with friends, but Thumper's wisdom is more difficult to apply to ourselves. Although we can't permanently silence our self-talk, there are ways to train it to say nice things.

### **Picking a New Self-Talk "Station"**

Are you tired of dealing with negative self-talk every day? Collins offers two steps for silencing negative self-talk.

#### **• Gain Awareness of Negative Self-Talk**

Recognize the way you're talking to yourself. What are you saying and how is it affecting you? Are you saying things you'd never say to anyone else? Before you can fix a problem, you must acknowledge its existence.

#### **• Seek New Ways of Thinking**

In order to send your negative self-talk packing, you need to fill its place with something else. "Find a mentor, a friend you respect and trust, someone who is content with herself and is succeeding in life," Collins says. Being mentored is one option, but there are many other ways to help you think positively. Here are a few others:

### **Count Your Blessings**

It's amazing how much being thankful affects your attitude. When I wake up in the morning, I try to list off 25 things I'm thankful for. Then, throughout the day I test myself by listing off five blessings. For example, this afternoon I was thankful that:

- I got off work early.
- One of my professors cancelled a quiz.

- I had lunch with a friend.
- I had time to go running.
- My sister left me a voice mail.

These list don't have to be complicated; you can be thankful that you have a car or a job or that you're healthy and slept well last night. You can count your blessings as you fall asleep, too.

### **Pray**

First Thessalonians 5:17 says "pray continually." God loves us and wants to hear from us about anything, any time. When you're about to kick yourself, stop and pray. Ask God to empower you to honor Him with your thoughts and actions. Surrender your self-talk to God. He wants you to be complete and whole even more than you do, and He has the power to make you more like Him.

### **Claim God's Truth**

The Bible boldly declares our identity, freedom and security in Christ. Memorize specific passages to counter negative self-talk. Here are a few to get you started:

- Psalm 139
- Romans 8:1
- Zephaniah 3:17
- Matthew 34-6:25
- Romans 39-8:31
- Psalm 28:7

### **Sing a Praise Song**

There are so many wonderful worship songs! Pick one you like, perhaps a song that deals with particular struggles. One of my favorite is "Trading My Sorrows." I like to think about surrendering up my mistakes, knowing that God forgives me so I can experience His joy.

Repeat a True, Positive Phrase

God has given all of us talents and abilities. Find out what yours are and develop them. If you have a good voice and just won a role in your school musical, congratulate yourself with a "Way to go! You worked hard and did a great job!" Know that your worth comes from God.

### **Transformation**

During this time of change, be gracious with yourself. Changing your self-talk is hard work. Be confident that the One who made you is fully capable of renewing your mind. He can and will do it. By His grace and power, your internal radio station will soon be tuned in to statements like these:

**"Nice job. I knew you could do it."**

**"Yes! You handled that so well."**

**"You studied hard to get it right."**

**"Wow, that was so awesome!"**

**"You're wonderfully created."**