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# Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

The Truth about Self-Care



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Click on an article you'd like to read:

- 3 INTRODUCTION**  
Spiritual Superhero or Stressed Out Serve-aholic?  
*By Kelli B. Trujillo*
- 6 LEADER'S GUIDE**  
How to use "Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?" for a group study.
- 7 WHO AM I? I FORGOT . . .**  
When we let important stuff slide, our true identity slips away.  
*By Holly Vicente Robaina*
- 11 CAPABLE, CALLED . . . AND EXHAUSTED**  
It's okay to lower our expectations. Really.  
*By Cheryl M. Scheir*
- 17 PUTTING SELF-LOVE IN ITS PLACE**  
Jonathan Edwards believed that personal fulfillment and loving God go hand-in-hand.  
*By Douglas A. Sweeney*
- 23 DISCOVERING A HEALTHIER YOU**  
Tips to help you feel more balanced physically and spiritually.  
*Interview by Amy M. Tatum*
- 32 OVERLOADED!**  
Every guilt-driven "yes" means a "no" to something important in my life.  
*By Brenda Jank*
- 37 WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR YOU LATELY?**  
12 ways to give yourself the special treatment you deserve.  
*By Camerin Courtney*
- 43 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**  
Books to help you further.



Introduction

# Spiritual Superhero or Stressed Out Serve-aholic?

By Kelli B. Trujillo

**M**eeet Jane. People often describe her as having a real "servant's heart." She's on the missions committee, she coordinates a women's Bible study group, and she often pinch-hits as a sub in the children's ministry. She goes the extra mile at work, trying to do her job excellently and also striving to squeeze in time to build meaningful relationships. Every day, she packs her kids' lunches, helps with homework, and reads bedtime stories. Many nights and weekends she's shuttling her kids to various sports and activities. In what little "spare time" she has between work, family, and volunteering, she's usually cleaning, doing the bills, or grocery shopping. She seems to embody Christ's call to deny herself and serve others.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

Spiritual Superhero or Stressed Out Serve-aholic?

Or we could describe her this way: Meet Jane. She usually eats unhealthy food on the go; she rarely exercises and doesn't get enough sleep. She hasn't put any significant time into her own hobbies and interests in about, say, ten years. Her efforts to connect to God through personal Bible study and prayer are irregular at best. Her stress level is dangerously high and her emotional well is near empty. When things get tense at work or at home, she feels she's about to seriously snap. She puts so much time and effort into serving and pleasing others that she doesn't even know who she is anymore. She's frazzled and run ragged. But isn't Jane pleasing God with all this self-denial?

Pop culture has the answer to Jane's dilemma: *Forget everybody else, Jane. Love yourself! Drop the volunteering for time at the spa getting pedicures. Cut back on family time so you can work out at least an hour everyday. Also be sure to spend daily time journaling, meditating, and reading inspiring novels. Don't let toxic thoughts about others' needs pull you down—focus only on your own happiness. Love yourself, Jane—it's the only way to find meaning in your life.*

Let's be frank: Pop culture's answer is definitely appealing! Who wouldn't love regular trips to the spa, a totally in-shape bod, and a perpetual sense of serenity? But is this what Jesus had in mind? When he said "Love your neighbor as yourself" did he mean we're to invite our neighbor over for manicures and mud masks with votive candles lit and Josh Grobin playing in the background? Is *this* the self-love God desires from us?

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

Spiritual Superhero or Stressed Out Serve-aholic?

Jane's approach to self-denial is obviously off kilter; likewise, pop culture's version of self-love is basically a well-packaged version of un-Christlike self-centeredness. God's Word calls us right into the tension between self-love and self-denial. Jesus assumes that we love and care for ourselves to some degree (see Matthew 22:39) but he also calls us to quite radically die to our own desires (see Matthew 16:24). How are we to navigate this paradox? To what degree should we care for ourselves—and why is it important to do so? Can we live out Jesus' call to self-denial while also living a healthy, balanced life?

The tension between self-love and self-denial is not easy to sort out, but we invite you to jump right in as you journey through the articles in this download. First you'll explore the negative impact of an overtaxing lifestyle as Holly Vicente Robaina and Cheryl M. Scheir give you a candid glimpse into their own tendency to neglect self-care. Next, you'll dive into the theological basis for making self-care a priority by looking at the life and beliefs of Jonathan Edwards. You'll conclude with three articles that offer practical suggestions for how you can care for yourself—body and soul—in God-honoring ways. Our hope is that this download will equip you to change the world for God—and take good care of yourself while you're at it. (And yeah, you can throw in a mud mask too . . . if you really want!)

Grace,

*Kelli B. Trujillo*

Managing Editor, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN downloads,  
Christianity Today International



Leader's Guide

## How to use “Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?” for a group study

**“Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?”** can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

- 1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
- 2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
- 3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
- 4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
- 5. When working through the “Reflect” questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It’s important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
- 6. End the session in prayer.**



## Who Am I? I Forgot . . .

When we let important stuff slide, our true identity slips away.

By Holly Vicente Robaina

**M**y friend Grace recently got together with some gal pals for a bridal shower and had a great, girly time. This included applying makeup, watching chick flicks, and taking lots of photos of themselves. She's a seminary student, so this was a rare break from the books. The girl-time sparked something in Grace: While she used to think such things were a waste of time, these activities made her long for the soft, feminine part of herself. (And she liked the way she looked with a little makeup on.)

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

Who Am I? I Forgot . . .

But Grace usually has little time to be a girly girl. Right now, she's mostly consumed by her role as a student. As she told me about her weekend adventure, I thought, *Hmm, I think Grace has been so busy, she forgot for a minute that she's a girl!* I know I've felt that way. I get so busy—consumed—that I often don't even feel human. I become either a robot stuck on autopilot, or a gray mass of mental mush. Often the first thing to go is my girly side, and it shows. I'll start wearing black sweatpants and T-shirts every day for weeks. (Black is easy to match, and it seems to mirror my mood during these periods!)

Since Grace had inspired me to think a real thought—which seemed like the first one I've had in some time—I seized the opportunity at sentience and pondered: *What parts of myself have I forgotten? Are there important aspects of my life that I've let slide under the pressure of deadlines and expectations of other parts of me?*

And I realized I'd forgotten a lot about myself. I'd forgotten I'm an artist ... and realized I forgot because I haven't painted anything in more than a year. I'd forgotten I like to sing for fun ... and realized I forgot because I stopped singing many years ago, out of fear that others would critique me. I'd forgotten my role as a daughter and a sister ... and realized I forgot because I haven't kept in touch with my dear family members. Things that once were sources of great joy for me had slipped away. And sadly, I'd hardly noticed.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

Who Am I? I Forgot . . .

Thinking about my spiritual life made me even sadder. I'd forgotten what it was like to sit silent before God. I'd forgotten how it felt to read Scripture without analyzing it—just to enjoy it and be edified by it. I'd forgotten the feelings of gratitude, surrender, peace, and hope that I get when I write in my prayer journal. It seemed downright daffy to allow such important things to slip out of my life. But I knew this was about something more than mere spiritual practices, which tend to wax and wane depending on my season of life. Just as Grace had momentarily forgotten her identity as a girl, I've been beginning to forget my identity as a daughter of the most high God.

On realizing this, I decided I need to tell some Christian friends about my "forgetfulness," for a couple reasons. First, when we become transparent and share our struggles, we're brought into accountability and community. In other words, my friends will know what's going on with me, and they can pray for me—and I can't deny what's going on in my life once it's been made public.

Second, when we share our lives, we recognize: (1) we need others, and (2) we are needed. I need support and prayer to recall and reclaim my most important identity as a child of God. And maybe one of my friends needs to hear about my struggle to know they're not alone.

I've gotta be honest: It's difficult for me to admit I feel distant from God. But when we humble ourselves in this way, God sees our contrite heart and is so kind and gentle. Through sharing, I've found this happens to all my Christian friends at times. And while it's frustrating to be in this

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

Who Am I? I Forgot . . .

place (again!), I'm thankful for the reminder: I need to *consistently* pray—for myself and for others—to be able to let go of the piddly stuff so we can remember who we are in Christ.

*Hollie Vicente Robaina is a TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN regular contributor. This article was published on [TodaysChristianWoman.com](http://TodaysChristianWoman.com) in 2009.*

## Reflect

- *Holly's brutally honest about her struggle, saying, "I get so busy—consumed—that I often don't even feel human. I become either a robot stuck on autopilot, or a gray mass of mental mush." Can you relate to Holly? How does busyness affect you? Be specific.*
- *What activities and demands—both good and bad—are consuming your time? Identify those that feel most burdensome to you right now.*
- *Holly asked herself a difficult question: What parts of myself have I forgotten? How would you answer this?*



# Capable, Called . . . and Exhausted

It's okay to lower our expectations. Really.

By Cheryl M. Scheir

**F**orget "Aim High" and "Be All You Can Be." This Army of One has a new motto: *Aim Lower*. For women today, whether at work or at home, the bar is set at a record high—and I'm determined to limbo under it.

Now, don't get the wrong idea. I think we're highly qualified to perform a dazzling array of tasks. But some of us have packed our schedules, overtaxed our talents, and gotten off track.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

Capable. Called . . . and Exhausted

We scrapbook, work out, pick up, drop off, volunteer, decorate, renovate, Twitter, cook, clean, organize, reorganize, and hold down jobs. The mothers among us enroll our kids in art classes, sports teams, and language lessons. We buy books dedicated to painting birdhouses, arranging the flowers we grew in our gardens, or decorating cupcakes to resemble any animal, sporting good, or historical figure, living or dead. If it can be done, we do it—and I, for one, am exhausted.

While some women subscribe to worldly models of overachievement, others conform to a wrong-headed version of the Christian superwoman; she's the biblical Martha in overdrive. Sensitive to every need, she's able to whip up gourmet meals with a single phone call. Always available, she swoops in to save any church member or ministry in distress. Infinitely talented, she's always willing to lend a helping hand.

I was one of these women. My typical Sunday: church choir commitments for three worship services, starting at 7:45 a.m. and ending around noon. Small group Bible study (at my house, of course) from 4 to 6. Factor in parenting a 2-year-old and a 4-year-old, straightening up the house, preparing beverages, shuttling kids to and from off-site baby-sitting—and you get the idea. Some "day of rest."

My overdoing certainly wasn't limited to Sunday. I regularly baked homemade goodies for school, church, and family events. I filled my schedule with up to six evening meetings a week. I served on countless committees and ran more than my share of fundraisers. And more often than I'd like to admit, I managed to find myself up past 11 p.m. frantically scrubbing the bathtub in case the next night's dinner guests should peek behind the shower curtain.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

Capable, Called . . . and Exhausted

Although I was doing it all, the Proverbs 31 woman I was not. Proverbs 31:28 says, "Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her." But my children would lift their heads from their pillows and ask, "Do we have to go to church again?" And my husband would stand in the kitchen doorway and drowsily ask, "Are you ever coming up to bed?"

My interpretation of Proverbs 31 was mistaken. In that chapter we have the example of an industrious, intelligent, well-rounded, God-centered woman. She works with her hands, makes real estate deals, gives to those in need, sells her handmade wares, and manages her household. She's so capable that she's intimidating! As a wise older woman once told me, though, the Proverbs 31 woman does it all—but she doesn't do it all in one day. She's the model of genuine poise and grace, not a frantic maniac. She strives for excellence, but to the advantage of her family, not at its expense.

Paul says it perfectly in his prelude to 1 Corinthians 13. Starting at 12:28, he describes the gifts that God has given to believers: to be apostles, some teachers, some healers, some helpers, some administrators. But then he speaks to the overachiever in us all as he writes, "Eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way" (12:31).

Paul goes on to describe love as the key ingredient in the believer's use of her gifts. Without it, he says, even her best efforts amount to little more than a clanging symbol. Our work as women of the kingdom—making disciples, serving the community of believers, and using whatever gifts God has given us—amounts to nothing without love as our primary motivation.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

Capable, Called . . . and Exhausted

In our frenzied coordination of family parties and preparation of "to die for" dishes for the next church potluck, we must examine ourselves. Some of us make these efforts out of the generosity of our loving spirits. But even these women may be tempted to overachieve out of a desire to impress or control others, a competitive spirit, a legalistic sense of duty, a perfectionist mindset, or a self-aggrandizing pride in their own talents and abilities.

It hasn't been easy for me to kick my high achievement habit. But I've held on to Paul's words: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2). When I embraced the worldly models of performance and achievement, my true colors were hidden in a veil of generosity. But what lay underneath was really selfishness. Now, laying aside those worldly models, I can identify my real motives, evaluate the worth of what I'm doing, and determine whether and when to say "no."

I recently hosted a birthday party for one of my children. It was the perfect opportunity to put my "aim lower" motto into practice. At first, the high achiever in me was after perfection. I wanted the guests to enjoy themselves so much that they'd talk about the event and my abilities for days.

As the party approached, though, I found myself erasing tasks from my to-do list. I cleaned the house, but didn't wash the kitchen floor. I weeded the garden, but didn't put down mulch.

As a result, I was able to *enjoy* the party, and my guests were able to enjoy my company. I wasn't exhausted from over-preparation or stressed by unimportant details. I wasn't

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

Capable. Called . . . and Exhausted

frustrated by the demands of perfectionism. Letting those things go, I was free to focus on conversation, celebration, and the joys of being in community. No doubt, my sensible side hit the bulls-eye. "Aim a little lower," it said, "and you'll be right on target."

### WANT TO AIM LOWER?

**1. Focus on a few.** A friend once praised her mother's tireless efforts to visit the sick, deliver meals, and offer rides to those in need. But in the same breath she told me, "Mom was busy doing all those things for other people, but she was never around for us."

The world around us is bursting with needs. It's tempting to try to meet them all. Instead of serving the needs of everyone (and spreading yourself thin in the process), concentrate on a smaller number of people: your husband, children, Bible study group, and two or three friends. Assigning a priority to each person or group helps you make wise choices about whom to serve and when. Of course, make exceptions as special circumstances arise, but by limiting your focus you can serve more effectively.

**2. Let others shine.** This isn't just a good way of taking the pressure off yourself—it's actually a biblical concept! God has given gifts to all members of the body of Christ, and his Word exhorts us to make room for everyone. First Corinthians 12:21-22 reminds us, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable ..." No one person should be doing it all because God has distributed gifts that complement one another. And though someone else may not do things the way you would, you may find yourself impressed by how other people's strengths compensate for your weaknesses.

**3. Slow down.** Life is full of opportunities for intimate encounters with people who need encouragement, guidance, or just a good laugh. Let's not barrel past them because we've overstuffed our to-do lists.

*Cheryl M. Scheir is a freelance author who lives with her family in Delaware. This article was first published in the March/April 2009 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Reflect

- *How would you describe the "Christian superwoman"? What's realistic about this woman and what's unrealistic?*
- *Read **Proverbs 31**. What feelings does this description draw out in you? Inspiration and enthusiasm? Guilt and discouragement? Why?*
- *Should we really aim to be a "Proverbs 31 woman"? What's good about setting such lofty goals? What can be dangerous about it? How might women with different personalities apply Proverbs 31 differently?*
- *Who's someone you admire who lives out one or more of the traits of the Proverbs 31 woman? What do you admire about her? How does she strike a balance in her life?*



## Putting Self-Love in its Place

Jonathan Edwards believed that personal fulfillment and loving God go hand-in-hand.

By Douglas A. Sweeney

**A**dour, killjoy Puritan—This is the image many have of Jonathan Edwards. After all, he's that fellow who preached "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," hanging his listeners over hell by a slender thread, right?

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Putting Self-Love in its Place

The most famous portrait of him seems to bear out the judgment. The Joseph Badger painting of Edwards depicts a man deeply somber, even severe—as if he has never enjoyed a summer day or a chocolate bar. Edwards, however, enjoyed not only summer days and chocolate, but also, above all, the Christian life itself. He insisted that believers should expect joy from their religion.

"It would be worth the while to be religious," he preached in one of his favorite sermons, on Proverbs 24:13–14, "if it were only for the pleasantness of it."

Christianity, he argued, brings a new and delightful harmony to social relationships. It "begets love and peace, good will one towards another, brotherly kindness, mutual benevolence, bounty and a feeling of each other's welfare." It "sweetens" the fellowship of those who believe, and makes people "delight in each other."

### **Amazing grace, how sweet**

Edwards also taught that the Christian gains a new pleasure in the things of religion. He remembered how his own conversion, in the Spring of 1721, had given him an inward, "sweet" sense both of Christ and of the way of salvation.

"My soul," he reminisced, "was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged, to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ; and the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation, by free grace in him."

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Putting Self-Love in its Place

In these contemplations he experienced "a calm, sweet abstraction of soul from all the concerns of this world." No mere intellectual, abstracted pleasure, this was the delight of intimacy—"a kind of vision . . . of being alone in the mountains, or some solitary wilderness, . . . sweetly conversing with Christ, and wrapt and swallowed up in God."

### Where happiness dwells

Edwards devoted most of his life to helping others experience this intimate joy. He liked to say that "true religion" is first and foremost an affair of the heart, in which God reaches down to us and reorients our souls. In fact, for Edwards, the most important thing God does in regeneration is to turn our hearts around, transforming our affections, and causing us to love his will and take delight in pursuing his ways. Given that God himself is the source of all that is good, true, and beautiful, Edwards believed that our deepest longings find their fulfillment in things divine.

Edwards found support for this teaching in the ancient tradition of Christian *eudaemonism* (the Greek term *eudaemonia* means "well being" or "happiness"). This tradition was founded in the philosophy of Aristotle, Christianized by the Greek Fathers, and bequeathed to the West in the work of St. Augustine. Its thrust was that self-love—that is, the desire for personal happiness and fulfillment—is not at odds with the love of God. A life of virtue is a happy life. Both virtue and happiness emerge out of a fervent pursuit of one's highest good.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Putting Self-Love in its Place

And what is that highest good? Quite simply, a loving union with God. The self—when its affections are *rightly* ordered by God's Spirit—finds satisfaction, personal fulfillment, and unprecedented joy in a biblical love of God and neighbor.

Thus, to put it bluntly, the call of salvation is a call to personal happiness. The love of God and human self-love go hand in hand. In the famous words of Augustine's *Confessions*, "you arouse [us] to take joy in praising you, for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

#### **Self-love, true and false**

Many early Protestant leaders (Martin Luther chief among them) were wary of Christian eudaemonism, for it seemed to sanction the selfish pursuit of personal pleasure. Indeed, Edwards himself was nervous about a related doctrine, beloved by later capitalists and known as "enlightened self-interest," which underwrote attempts to promote social welfare by the pursuit of private gain. Edwards experienced first-hand this social ideal's negative effects: The greed of several leading businessmen in Northampton frequently undermined his ministry there. In Stockbridge, the English settlers alienated the Indians with dirty business deals, swindling them of their land and thus thwarting Edwards's ministry among them.

But while Edwards knew the dangers of *unregulated* self-love, he distinguished this from his confidence in *rightly* ordered self-love, which he considered a blessing made possible by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Putting Self-Love in its Place

So he argued, with his usual logical force and precision, in his sermon on "Charity Contrary to a Selfish Spirit." Self-love and the desire for happiness are perfectly natural. A person's will must always be inclined, by preference, in one direction or another. It leads the person into sin only when it becomes disoriented, fixing its desires on the wrong objects or in the wrong ways (which, in the state of original sin, it always does).

Therefore, regeneration does not eradicate self-love; rather, it reorients it and sets it on the path to its true, ultimate fulfillment. It does not lessen our desire for happiness; rather, it reveals the true, ultimate object of that desire—God himself.

With Augustine, Edwards wholeheartedly believed that God has created us to have a longing only he can satisfy. The bad news is that we are sinners who try to fill this God-shaped vacuum with lesser gods—things like sex, money, and power. But the good news is that God is love and wants to be our all in all. His regenerating grace can reorient our souls, re-attune our wayward affections, and magnify his glory, while granting to us a joy unspeakable.

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## Reflect

- *Edwards adhered to eudaemonism, a theological framework that believed "self-love—that is, the desire for personal happiness and fulfillment—is not at odds with the love of God . . . The love of God and human self-love go hand in hand." What do you think of this idea? Is it compatible with passages like **Matthew 16:24–25** and **Mark 9:33–35**? Why or why not?*
- *Read **Proverbs 24:13–14**. When preaching on this passage, Edwards remarked on the sweetness and pleasantness of following God. How has your spiritual life been "sweet to your soul"? When have you felt fulfilled or happy as a result of seeking God?*
- *In his article, Sweeney writes that "while Edwards knew the dangers of unregulated self-love, he distinguished this from his confidence in rightly ordered self-love." What are some examples of unregulated self-love as espoused by our culture?*
- *In your opinion, what's the difference between unregulated self-love and rightly ordered self-love? In practical terms, how can you tell the difference?*



# Discovering a Healthier You

Tips to help you feel more balanced physically and spiritually.

Interview by Amy M. Tatum

**D**oes finding the motivation, energy, and extra minutes in a day to stay healthy seem impossible in this spread-yourself-too-thin world? You're probably thinking, *How could I possibly have time to go to the gym between work, dinner, and my kids' soccer practice? And even if I had time, where would I start?*

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Discovering a Healthier You

Personal trainer Ruth McGinnis, author of *Living the Good Life* and *Breathing Freely: Celebrating the Imperfect Life*, shared her expertise with us on how to take better care of yourself—and, surprise!—she even urges you not to feel guilty if you don't have time to hit the gym. Check out her practical tips to rejuvenate your vitality and live more abundantly starting today.

#### ***If you haven't been taking care of yourself, how on earth do you find the motivation to begin?***

First of all, nobody can motivate another person. You have to have that inner desire for a healthier life. But one motivation that works for almost everyone is fear—the fear of losing your range of motion, the fear of high cholesterol or high blood pressure.

When you're in your 40s, as I am, you start to realize maintenance is crucial. If you don't start maintaining the health you've already got, look out, because it doesn't get easier. Investing in your health isn't a luxury. Often I've found a woman with a husband and kids to care for feels guilty making that investment in herself. But when you start to lose muscle mass, gain weight, and feel tired all the time, you can't give something you don't have. Nobody benefits from a woman who doesn't take care of herself.

#### ***So how do you get started?***

It's not easy, especially for women with small children and hectic lives. But the first big important step is getting enough sleep. Keeping regular sleeping hours is crucial, because the more disciplined things, such as eating right and exercising, are harder to implement if you're exhausted.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Discovering a Healthier You

Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at about the same time every morning. That's a tried-and-true method for improving your sleep. The problem is, many of us get involved watching television, or suddenly have a spurt of energy to clean the kitchen at the end of the day. Those things distract the body from preparing itself for sleep. Look at the way you manage your hours, especially late in the day, and make wiser choices to help you get to bed earlier and to give yourself more time to wind down so you can sleep.

#### ***Any suggestions?***

Turn off that television and computer! Artificial light from the computer stimulates your nervous system, so it makes it harder for you to fall asleep.

Some people take a bath or read; others turn down the phone ringer. Turn off bright lights and lower the noise level even for 30 minutes.

Our culture expects us to run ourselves ragged on an inhuman schedule. Lots of truly exhausted people still have trouble falling asleep because their mind's still going. Maybe they've worked hard mentally but haven't exerted their body all day, which makes it tough to get a good night's sleep.

#### ***Many of us sit all day at work. How can we exert ourselves more?***

You have to look for opportunities to move around. For example, if you work on the second floor, use the stairs instead of the elevator. One of the greatest exercises for your backside is to go up stairs two at a time. By lifting your leg that much higher, you really engage your rear-end muscles. Over a period of time, the difference between taking the

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Discovering a Healthier You

stairs versus taking the elevator has a significant impact on how much muscle you use and how many calories you burn. Building and maintaining muscle mass, especially later in life, is extremely important.

Also, taking a 15-minute walk during your lunch hour or break time can have huge benefits. Even if you don't have time to change clothes and go to a gym, you still can accomplish something by just going out and walking. Grab a friend, and make it fun.

### ***You're suggesting we change the way we think about an exercise regimen?***

Exactly! A regimen doesn't mean you have to go to the gym or a weight-loss program to experience some benefits. Those things are great, but a regimen can be as simple as being aware of crucial areas—staying hydrated, getting sleep, being more active, eating right—and applying small steps daily to make a difference in your health.

Our generation grew up during the fitness revolution. We've been taught we need to have an ideal fitness regimen. But what's been lost in that message is that even if you don't have time to do an optimal fitness routine, there's still lots you can do every day to make a huge difference in your health. Integrating little spurts of activity during the day, even if it's just taking the stairs, helps.

Many health clubs today have terrific deals for women to help with exercise and motivation. Several offer free childcare. Try visiting different gyms to find the one right for you, or partner with a friend to exercise together.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Discovering a Healthier You

One of my former clients, who wanted to feel more fit, didn't want to join a health club. Instead, she signed up for ice-skating lessons. She got regular exercise and worked all the muscles in her body—plus she loved it! Discovering something you love to do, even if it doesn't sound like a typical fitness routine, is a great way to maintain your motivation.

#### ***What if your energy wanes in the late afternoon or evening?***

I know what you mean. At the end of the day, lots of women say to themselves, *I should go on a walk before I have to start dinner, or do push-ups and crunches*, but they feel too fatigued to do it. That's where you have to take a leap of faith and believe that making the effort actually will make you feel less tired and will help you sleep at night.

There's a mental game you can play to help get motivated. Think to yourself, *I'm just going to put on my walking shoes*. Then, after you do that, tell yourself, *I'm just going to walk for 5 minutes because I'm so tired*. Usually those 5 minutes turn into a 20-minute walk. I can't count the number of times I've done that for myself.

Also, being dehydrated can cause you to have low energy. Most people don't drink the eight to ten glasses of water they need daily. Always keep water with you so you're hydrating your body.

#### ***Once a woman's motivated to live more healthily, where can she turn for encouragement to keep going?***

Turn to Scripture for encouragement. Psalm 121:1–2 says, "I lift my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." That's my motto. I remind myself of all the things I can't control, and of who *is* in control.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Discovering a Healthier You

Also, there are Scripture references that remind us God didn't design us to be couch potatoes. For example, Isaiah 40:31 says, "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." God designed us with an incredible body. He designed us to thrive, to dig into our human resources and use them. That verse in Isaiah reminds me that investing in my physical well-being can be a spiritual pursuit.

#### ***How so?***

When I'm too busy, it's hard for me to balance my spiritual life, to connect with God. That's why quiet time for reflection is monumentally important.

A lot of times, I'll make a concentrated effort to pray for the concerns of my heart, then stop and listen to God. It's interesting to be present with God without an agenda. Being open to receive comfort or an answer or direction takes time.

But I'm just like everybody else—I wake up in the morning with expectations for the day. I know I'll have challenges in terms of time management, and disappointments in areas I can't control. I went through a process of relinquishing control before I felt as though I could surrender to God. I'm trying to make that leap from *my* will be done to *thy* will every day. Every morning I get up, surrender my schedule to God, and try to celebrate each day.

#### ***That's tough to do in our culture.***

When I turn on the television and see people who've had the benefit of a make-up artist, hair stylist, special lighting, or cosmetic surgery, I realize our culture has lured us into

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Discovering a Healthier You

believing people with outer beauty have it all together. What we really need are role models to share that there's beauty in the aging process. We read about the celebrity culture and the amount of time they devote to looking perfect. We need to be reminded how very empty that is. In the process, they're losing time they could be investing in other areas of life, such as relationships. And ultimately, we fight a losing battle with aging. Your body's going to change, and your skin's going to get bigger than your body. You're not supposed to look 20 when you're 50.

#### ***But we can make choices to stay healthy.***

Yes. A healthy lifestyle is a lifetime pursuit. It's not something you just get one day and have forever. Put a healthy lifestyle together in a way that works for you, and don't feel bombarded by the messages from the fitness world, infomercial world, and talk-show world.

My message isn't a thrilling, cutting-edge breakthrough. It's not the kind of regimen that's going to make headline news because it's simply a reassuring message that the basics have worked and continue to work. That's why I love the ice-skating story so much. When I heard about that woman's workout routine, I thought, *Good for you for finding something that's a passion for you.*

We each have a better idea of what's good for us than we give ourselves credit for. And pop culture is largely to blame for that, because we have these insidious messages always coming at us to tell us we're not thin enough, not young enough, not rich enough, not organized enough. Martha Stewart makes me break out in hives. She should see my kitchen floor—it's always a mess!

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Discovering a Healthier You

But there's so much freedom in being able to see the beauty and uniqueness of your own life and body. Investing in your well-being is investing in your life. Putting on a pair of shoes and going for a walk is a wonderful way to make you feel healthier. But to be able to practice being who you are and celebrate your unique gifts—to be able to discern what matters and what doesn't, and to be committed to a meaningful life—*that's* what life's all about.

#### TIPS FOR GETTING FIT

##### *6 things you can do daily to impact your well-being.*

**Avoid falling for fitness revolution hype.** Between unrealistic body types, skimpy clothing, and all the machines purporting to keep you fit, there are many reasons to feel discouraged. Observe fitness industry images with detachment; remind yourself the best reason to exercise is to stay healthy, and you already have everything you need to be physically active.

**Keep track of your efforts.** Record your activity so you can fine-tune your approach to exercise by discovering what works for you. Another benefit: It's motivating to see results from the efforts you make toward better health.

**Make deals with yourself.** When you don't have the desire to tackle a 20-minute walk, give yourself permission to do 5 minutes, and let yourself off the hook. Usually a 5-minute walk will turn into 20 minutes. Getting started is the most important step toward physical activity as a way of life.

**Find a fitness professional.** It's possible to hire a qualified trainer without breaking the bank. Most can design a safe and effective exercise program for you, work with you for a few sessions, then follow up when needed. Try to find a fitness professional with certification from ACSM (the American College of Sports Medicine), NASM (the National Academy of Sports Medicine), ACE (American Council on Exercise), or another nationally recognized fitness trainer organization.

**Make exercise enjoyable.** Choose an activity you look forward to doing; otherwise, it won't become a consistent part of your life. For me, running with my sister or my dog is always more compelling than running alone.

**Give yourself permission to start over.** When it comes to exercise, nothing's more defeating than an all-or-nothing attitude. Remind yourself, *I can negotiate my goals and my good intentions as often as necessary.*

*Ruth McGinnis—a writer, musician, and physical trainer—died of ovarian cancer in October 2009. For more information about Ruth's music and her insights into physical and spiritual health, check out her website at [www.ruthmcginnis.com](http://www.ruthmcginnis.com). This article was first published in the September/October 2002 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Reflect

- *Among all the competing demands, commitments, and priorities in your life, where does caring for your physical health land? Do you put enough time into exercise and healthy eating? Why or why not?*
- *How important do you think it is to God that you care for your physical health? Explain.*
- *How does exercise or a lack of it affect you emotionally?*
- *Which of Ruth's ideas and tips most interests you? Why?*



# Overloaded!

Every guilt-driven “yes” means a “no” to something important in my life.

By Brenda Jank

**W**ith the relentless sobbing of three preschoolers ringing in my ears, I succumbed to a full-blown mommy-meltdown. I sank into the nearest chair overwhelmed and shaking. For months I’d been running ragged on the fumes of an empty tank.

The reality of this truth threatened every fiber of my being. I adored my “three musketeers” (all in diapers), who kept me running. But I also continued to minister to a host of people through golden opportunities I couldn’t resist. Lost in waves of failure and pain, I felt my husband’s hand on my shoulder. I looked up to find him holding out my Bible, my purse, and the car keys.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Overloaded!

"Brenda, it's time for a break." His eyes were kind. "We'll be okay."

Laced with love and no condemnation, Tim added, "Don't come back until the boys are in bed."

Guilt threatened my next move—but with a hefty dose of persuasion, love won out.

"Okay," I said. It was a moment of victory. I slipped through the door, ignoring the heightened wailing that ensued.

Ahhhh ...

### **The right driving force**

Guilt. It's a driving force behind much of our exhaustion. As Christian women, we say too many *nos* to the rhythms of rest and too many *yeses* to good things, like baking cupcakes, chaperoning car washes, shopping for a neighbor, or helping with the church's website. Every guilt-driven *yes* means a *no* to something important in my life.

Every day holds 24 hours. As gifted as we are at multi-tasking, there are concrete limits to what can get done in any given day. The result? We routinely short-change the top priorities of our lives. We're irritable and impatient with those we love. We forfeit our need for sleep. We pass through many days oblivious to the presence of God.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

Overloaded!

A remarkable story about guilt is tucked into the very first chapter of Mark. I missed its message for the first 40 years of my life, but it will be a driving force for the next 40.

When Jesus visited Simon's home where his mother-in-law was sick in bed, Jesus healed her and the news spread quickly. That evening the whole town gathered at their door. Jesus ministered to each one late into the night.

Waking early the next morning, Jesus slipped away to a quiet place to be alone with his Father. As the sun rose, a fresh batch of people gathered at the house. A group of disciples went looking for Jesus. When they finally found him, they announced, "Everyone is looking for you!" Can you hear their intent to instill guilt? The people waiting at the house for Jesus had legitimate needs and a real desire to meet him. Yet listen to Jesus' reply: "Let us go somewhere else ..."

Refusing to be guilt-driven, Jesus chose to be Spirit-led. Jesus' holy *yes* to God meant an earthly *no* to real people with real needs. The lesson is clear—just because there's a need, doesn't mean I've been called to meet it. The next time an opportunity comes knocking on your door, consider these three suggestions.

**Stop.** Don't answer on the spot. Reply, "Let me get back to you." Then pray. Listen carefully. If you're living with little margin, any "yes" you say will demand a "no" to something, whether you want it to or not. What will that be? Face the truth.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

Overloaded!

***Know your mission for the season of life you're now living.*** Name it for yourself—be confident in your call. Be incredibly sensitive and prayerful about any yes outside its domain.

***Following Jesus' lead, remind yourself that saying "yes" or "no" requires direction from the Holy Spirit.*** It takes conviction, vision, and stamina, but it produces, joy, confidence, and a work of God that far exceeds the guilt-driven yeses we are often inclined to give.

Are you facing a decision that will place you on overload? Are you willing to pay the price? Are you willing to require your family to pay the price? We're asked to run hard, but not at the continual expense of rhythm. An earthly *no* may very well be the best *yes* you've said to God in a very long time.

*Serving at a Christian retreat center in NE Indiana, Brenda Jank has been launching ministries that introduce people to the rhythm of rest for 16 years. As the mother of five, her passion for rest stems from a home-grown need to rediscover abundant life in the chaos of 21st-century living. This article was first published on [TodaysChristianWoman.com](http://TodaysChristianWoman.com) in 2009.*

## Reflect

- *Brenda writes that "Every guilt-driven yes means a no to something important in my life." When have you said a guilt-driven yes? What were the results in your life? in your family's life?*
- *Brenda describes the effects of guilt-driven yeses this way: "We routinely short-change the top priorities of our lives. We're irritable and impatient with those we love. We forfeit our need for sleep. We pass through many days oblivious to the presence of God." Do you see yourself in this description? On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 meaning "zero negative impact" and 10 meaning "significant negative effects"), honestly evaluate how over-commitment and busyness may be affecting your:
  - *emotional health*
  - *family relationships and friendships*
  - *physical health*
  - *spiritual health**
- *Read **Mark 1:29–39**. Was Jesus being selfish by intentionally neglecting others' needs for a period of time in order to spend time in prayer? Why or why not?*
- *Brenda's take on this story is that "Jesus' holy yes to God meant an earthly no to real people with real needs. The lesson is clear—just because there's a need, doesn't mean I've been called to meet it." Do you often feel compelled to address every (or most) needs set before you? Can you picture yourself making the same sort of choice Jesus did in this story? Why or why not?*
- *In evaluating where you spend your time and energy, Brenda challenges you to "know your mission for the season of life you're now living." How would you verbalize that mission right now? What important things or people is God calling you to say yes to? Are there taxing commitments in your life that fall outside the realm of that mission?*



# What Have You Done for You Lately?

12 ways to give yourself the special treatment you deserve.

By Camerin Courtney

**A**while back I looked at my to-do list and noticed something terribly wrong. It wasn't so much what was on my list: call the women on my church committee, bake cookies for our staff coffee break, buy a present for a friend's upcoming wedding. The problem was what *wasn't* on my list: me.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### What Have You Done for You Lately?

Before you start thinking me selfish, stop a minute. As Christian women, we spend most of our time taking care of others—coworkers, friends, spouse, Sunday school students, children, roommates, etc.—and next to no time making sure we're as fulfilled and balanced as all the other people in our life.

On the brink of burnout, I knew I had to make some changes. While I was sure a two-week vacation in a sleepy town in Italy would do the trick, I decided to settle for a few simpler—and less budget-busting!—ways to pamper myself. Try a few of these yourself—before you succumb to mental melt-down.

**Reward yourself.** More than once I've splurged and bought myself a pint of Ben & Jerry's ice cream after my first week on a new job—even if it was just an internship or summer employment. Some weeks I just have to celebrate making it to Friday. What have you—or a friend—accomplished lately? Make it an excuse to celebrate.

**Console yourself.** When I was a young girl, my mom had a tradition of buying my sister and me a chocolate shake at Wendy's if we were good during a doctor's visit. This is a ritual I still observe—especially for gynecological visits (ick!), painful trips to the dentist (but don't tell him!), and even an occasional visit to the mechanic. Misery may love company, but a Frosty doesn't hurt, either!

**Start a tradition.** My roommate and I love our annual Couch Potato Day, for which we stay in our pjs all day and watch three movies in a row from the comfort of our two couches. We usually schedule this during the bleak Chicago

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### What Have You Done for You Lately?

winter when being cozy indoors is a real treat. Another tradition I love is escaping to the local coffee shop over my lunch hour once a week to read my latest favorite book.

***Nap.*** Some days I zoom home over my lunch hour, fit in a quick nap, and return to the office with fresh energy to tackle my inbox. Give me an hour (on nonworking days, of course), and I'm ready to take on the world. This might seem like a lot of time to devote to yourself, but the dividends to you—and others!—are well worth the sacrifice.

***Learn something.*** Last year I took a one-day class in which I learned how to make one of those expensive, handmade photo albums. It was a great break from my usual routine and launched a new hobby. Have you always had an interest in something you've wanted to explore? Check out your local community college, park district, or church calendar for some mind-enriching options.

***Create something.*** There's nothing like coming home from a brain-busting day at the office and sanding furniture. Really! I recently refinished a bookshelf and—after several tries—gave it an antiques look. While my motives were mostly utilitarian—I needed a place to put my growing collection of cookbooks—the results were creative and freeing. Since we're made in the image of the Creator, we all possess creativity. What have you done with yours lately?

***Treat yourself like a vacationer.*** Part of what I love about staying in a hotel—besides having someone else clean up after me every day—are the little niceties: a carnation on the room service tray, gourmet coffee, small bottles of

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### What Have You Done for You Lately?

yummy-smelling lotion and shampoo. I've found those little touches, such as setting the table even when I'm home alone eating canned soup, can make a big difference.

***Paint your toenails in winter.*** Or wear lacy underwear even if you're single and no one else will see it. These are fun and tangible ways to remind yourself you're special.

***Dream big, act small.*** Picture yourself five years from now. What do you hope you've accomplished, seen, achieved in those five years? My big dream is to vacation in Italy. My small actions now are sending for tour brochures and reading a travel narrative about Italy. These little things make my goal seem less distant or unreachable.

***Sing to yourself in the car.*** Next time you're in your car alone, turn off the radio and sing your favorite show tunes, nursery songs, hymns, or whatever makes you smile. It doesn't matter if you can't carry a tune or if the man in the next car looks at you funny—he's either sung a car solo himself sometime or you've just given him a chuckle for the day.

***Strategically place photos.*** My roommate put a funny magazine ad with two men doing housework in the closet where we keep our cleaning supplies. Every time I reach for the 409 or Windex, I laugh all over again. Beat the drudgery of housework by putting photos of loved ones (or favorite comic strips) near your washer and dryer or the desk where you pay bills.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

What Have You Done for You Lately?

***Splurge on one thing at the grocery store.*** Each time I make a major grocery store run, I treat myself to one thing not on my list. Whether it's flowers, gourmet hot chocolate, or a new expensive brand of cereal, it brightens my day and makes me feel special each time I smell, drink, or eat whatever I bought.

At the heart of all these ideas is one simple principle—you're a priceless person created by God who deserves to be treated as such. It's not about being selfish, it's about being *balanced*. You can't meet everyone else's needs and do everything God's designed you for if you're running on empty. So brainstorm one way you can add yourself to your to-do list. You'll thank yourself for it later. And probably everyone else on your list will, too!

*Camerin Courtney is a writer who served as an editor of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN for many years. This article was first published in the March/April 1999 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Reflect

- What's one memory of a time in your life when you felt rested, balanced, happy, or at peace? What were you doing? Who was with you? What else was going on in your life at the time? Describe your memory.
- If you had one hour to yourself today—completely free of any demands or responsibilities—what would you most want to do to care for yourself? Why?
- Which of Camerin's ideas appeals to you the most? Why? (And will you do it?)
- In light of all you've read and reflected on in this download, what's one specific way you'll commit to care for yourself?



# Additional Resources

Books, Bible studies, and articles to help you further.

## Books

**The Busy Mom's Guide to Spiritual Survival** by Kelli B. Trujillo (Wesleyan, 2006; 192 pages). Take a fresh look at some classic spiritual practices through the eyes of the busiest people on earth, mothers of small children. You'll find out why these practical disciplines are so important for maintaining a vibrant spiritual life and discover realistic, doable ways to implement them in everyday life—with kids.

**Change Your Life: Achieve a Healthy Body, Heal Relationships & Connect with God** by Becky Tirabassi (Berkley Trade, 2001; 240 pages). What do you long to transform—your health? Relationships? Your connection with God? Tirabassi's simple 4-step plan emphasizes awareness, admission, action, and accountability; and utilizes specific tasks to facilitate change: diet and exercise, plan and persevere, give and forgive, and talk and listen to God. Spiritual self-help for your journey toward a more fulfilling life!

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Additional Resources

**Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ** by Peter Scazzero (Thomas Nelson, 2006; 224 pages). The Christian faith is supposed to produce deep, positive change. So why doesn't it seem to work in "real life"? That question screamed at Pastor Peter Scazzero when his church and marriage hit bottom and every Christian remedy produced nothing but anger and fatigue. As he began digging under the "good Christian" veneer, he uncovered entire emotional layers of his life that God had not yet touched. In *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Scazzero unveils what's wrong with our conventional means of "spiritual growth" and offers seven biblical, reality-tested, transformational steps that will help you live out your faith with authenticity, awareness, and a hunger for God.

**The Hidden Link Between Adrenaline and Stress** by Dr. Archibald Hart (Thomas Nelson, 1995). Dr. Archibald Hart tells how you can kick the adrenaline habit, which can lead to stress and premature death. Dr. Hart explains how adrenaline gets going, how to get it down again, and how to monitor your own adrenaline arousal. This advice-packed book points you toward a more peaceful, healthy life.

**The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath** by Mark Buchanan (Thomas Nelson, 2007; 270 pages). In *The Rest of God*, author Mark Buchanan says that the Sabbath is essential to our full humanity and faith. God set forth a rhythm of work and rest that if restored to our lives will bring prolonged life, enriched relationships, increased fruitfulness, and abundant joy.

## Love Yourself? Deny Yourself?

### Additional Resources

**Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation** by Ruth Haley Barton (InterVarsity Press, 2006; 192 pages). Do you wonder how you might truly live your life as God created you to live it? Spiritual disciplines are activities that open us to God's transforming love and the changes that only God can bring about in our lives. *Sacred Rhythms* takes you more deeply into understanding seven key disciplines along with practical ideas for weaving them into everyday life.

**Working Mom's 411: How to Manage Kids, Career, and Home** by Michelle LaRowe (Gospel Light, 2009; 224 pages). This all-in-one book is for the two-parent working household. Author Michelle LaRowe shows you how to navigate the rough waters of managing kids, career, and home. Using humor and expertise, she shares time saving tips on scheduling, marriage, self care, and parenting.

## Bible Studies

**"From Dawn 'Til Dusk—Discover God's Rest in a Busy Life,"** a single-session study available from [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com).

**"Rest for the Weary,"** a single-session study available from [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com).

**"Balancing Work and Home,"** a 6-session study series available from [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com).

## Articles

**“Getting Away with God”** by Brenda Jank from TODAY'S CHRISTIAN.

**“Healthy Body, Healthy Soul?”** By LaTonya Taylor on the [TodaysChristianWoman.com](http://TodaysChristianWoman.com).

**“Running Yourself Ragged?”** by Jeanne Zornes on [TodaysChristianWoman.com](http://TodaysChristianWoman.com).

**“Taking a Sharpie to Your List”** by Kelli B. Trujillo on [GiftedforLeadership.com](http://GiftedforLeadership.com).

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