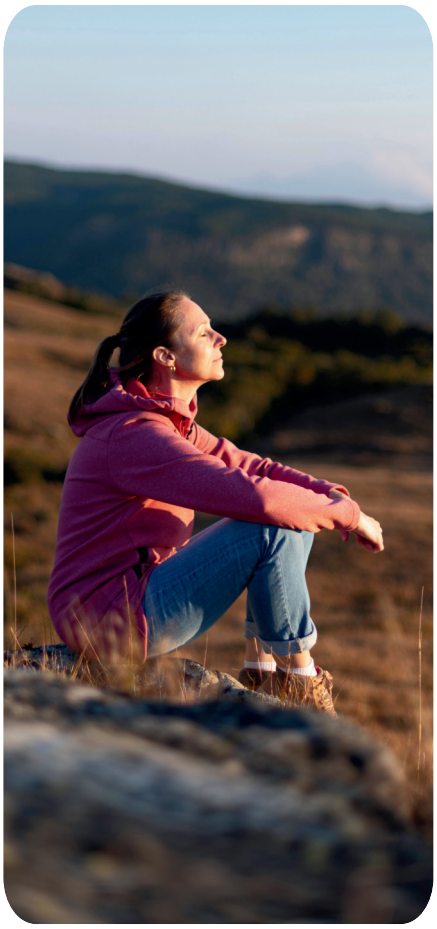
Duke | CLERGY HEALTH COLLABORATIVE

A SELF-COMPASSION MEDITATION WITH JESUS

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.
- 1 John 4:18

Everybody has something about themselves that causes them to feel shame, or not "good enough." It is the human condition to be imperfect, and feelings of failure and inadequacy are part of the experience. They're also a perfect opportunity to receive the gift of self-compassion from Jesus, who speaks words of comfort and courage over us like a fierce friend.

This meditation draws on the evidenced-based practice of "distanced self-talk" to help us hear him. Repeat this exercise daily or weekly, especially when you are feeling stuck in self-critique. May the voice of shame transform into a voice of compassion which you can readily access, moving you from isolation back into resurrected community.



To begin:
Take 5 minutes to silence your phone and turn off distractions. Find a comfortable position. You can close your eyes if you are comfortable. You can also journal this exercise if you find it helpful.

Next, take a moment to reflect:
Think about an issue you have that tends to make you feel inadequate or bad about yourself. What emotions come up for you when you think about this aspect of yourself? Try to feel your emotions exactly as they are – no more, no less.

Now, imagine Jesus sitting beside you:
Imagine Jesus, unconditionally loving, kind, and compassionate, coming alongside you. Imagine how Jesus sees you: in all your strengths and all your weaknesses, including the aspects of yourself you have just considered. Ask him, *Who do you say that I am?*

In his great wisdom, Jesus understands your life history and the millions of things that have happened to create you as you are in this moment. Your inadequacies are connected to so many things you didn't necessarily choose: your genes, your family history, your circumstances – things that were outside of your control. Imagine Jesus speaking to you, calling you by name. Ask him, *What do you say about the inadequacy I tend to judge myself for? What do you say about my "flaw" from the perspective of your unlimited compassion? How do you want to express the deep compassion you feel for me, especially for the pain I feel when I judge myself harshly? Can you please remind me that I am only human, that all people have both strengths and weaknesses?*

If you think Jesus would suggest possible changes you should make in your life, ask him, *How then shall I live?* Pay attention to how these suggestions embody feelings of unconditional understanding and compassion. As you imagine Jesus meeting you in your moment of suffering and shame, feel the strong sense of acceptance, kindness, caring, and desire for your health and happiness that he offers over you.

Stay with Jesus as long as you need, allowing him to speak to you. Notice where you are tempted to resist or argue against his compassion. Notice what it feels like to receive compassion in your place of suffering.

To close:
Pick at least one phrase from Jesus that stuck with you. Repeat it again to yourself, but this time hearing it in your own voice, calling yourself by name and speaking the same compassion over yourself.

Adapted from Neff, Kristin. (2026). *Self-Compassion Exercises.* Self-Compassion Institute with Kristin Neff. https://self-compassion.org/wptest/wp-content/uploads/self_compassion_exercise.pdf.