

**Write from the Deep**  
**Karen Ball & Erin Taylor Young**  
**Going Deeper Workshop: Overcoming Damaging Self-Talk**  
**Segment 15: Developing a Habit of Positive Self-Talk**

Note: This segment combines the action steps with the teaching. There isn't a separate audio or PDF for action steps.

**Why develop a *habit* of positive self-talk?**

- “Lasting change is a product of daily habits” (James Clear, [Transform Your Habits](#)).
- We want to permanently revolutionize the way we speak.

**Habits are powerful because we do them without the hard brain work of *making the decision to do them*.**

- Even simple decisions require brain energy.
- Once habits are established our brains do them on autopilot, which saves your brain energy for better things.
- Charles Duhigg's book *The Power of Habit* discusses how habits are controlled by the basal ganglia, while decisions are made in a different part of the brain: the prefrontal cortex.
- When you're tired, frustrated, discouraged, etc., you're less likely to have the brain energy to make good decisions, and you're more likely to react with your basal ganglia. You want that reaction to be the good habit of positive self-talk, not a damaging pattern.

**There are several benefits to the habit of positive self-talk.**

- God delights in us knowing, writing, and speaking truth. Not suppressing it.
- “Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part, You will make me know wisdom.” Psalm 51:6.
- This is not about giving yourself a hyped up pep talk everyday.
- You simply want to constantly and consistently speak truths that reflect who you are as God's child and the gifts God gave you.
- The more something is repeated, the more it seems true, and the more we believe it and act in accordance with those beliefs.

**There are three steps in how a habit works:**

(information taken from Duhigg and Clear)

1. Reminder – something that triggers the behavior; also called a cue or trigger
  - a. Seeing your toothbrush on the bathroom counter can be a reminder. When you see it, it reminds you to brush your teeth.
  - b. A text notification sound on your phone can be a reminder—a trigger to check your phone.
2. Routine – the actions, or the behavior that the reminder triggers
  - a. Brushing your teeth is the routine or behavior that’s triggered when you see the toothbrush.
  - b. Checking your text is the routine or behavior you do when you hear a notification on your phone.
3. Reward – the benefit you gain from the behavior
  - a. If the reward or benefit is positive, you’ll want to repeat the behavior!
  - b. Brushing your teeth leads to fewer cavities, that’s a reward which motivates you to repeat the behavior, the routine.
  - c. When you check a text, your curiosity is satisfied. That’s a reward that makes you want to repeat that behavior.

**Action Step:**

Apply the three components of reminder, routine, and reward to develop a habit of positive self-talk:

1. Choose the specific routine, or behavior. Experts advise that you start with something small—so easy you can’t say no.
  - a. The routine you’ll do everyday will be to speak this truth: *God delights in me* (from Zephaniah 3:17 and Psalm 149:4).
  - b. Or you can stop the recording and decide on a different truth phrase you want to speak everyday. Make sure it’s short and relevant.
  - c. Write that phrase here: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Pick a reminder, a trigger, to cue your routine of saying your truth phrase.

- a. You want a good reminder, because that's what doing the routine depends on.
- b. To find good reminders, make a list of activities you do everyday without fail. For example, waking up, drinking coffee, opening the fridge. Write them below.

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- c. Now list activities that *happen to you* everyday without fail. For example, you experience a sunset, you feed your child, you stop for red light.

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- d. Look over both those lists and decide which one will give you the best chance to trigger the routine of speaking your truth phrase. For example, if you're a visual person, you might choose opening the fridge as your reminder, and then you can even write *God delights in me* on a notecard and stick it to your fridge.

- e. Circle the reminder you think will work best, or write a new one below.

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3. Pick a reward. The reward is what makes you want to repeat the routine. That's what establishes the pattern that turns into a habit.

- a. For your reward, you could simply celebrate. Smile and say, “Yay me! I’m proclaiming truth.” The good feeling you get for celebrating is the reward.
  - b. Other options could be a small, tasty treat, or playing with your dog, or whatever pleasant, simple reward you can think of.
  - c. Take a few minutes to decide on your reward and write it below.
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**There are some important things to keep in mind about habits:**

- A study found it takes 66 days on average to develop a habit. Be patient and willing to invest the time.
- Researchers also found that a mistake here and there won’t affect your ability to build the habit. Don’t beat yourself up if you miss a day, just keep moving forward.
- You can’t simply stop a bad habit. That’s ineffective. The best thing to do is replace a bad habit with a good habit.
- We all fall prey to damaging self-talk now and then, but if it has progressed to a habit, it’s important to understand that we need to replace that habit rather than simply trying to quit the habit.

**You can help stop damaging self-talk before it starts:**

- Alter the pattern of your activities to avoid the reminders/triggers that initiate negative self-talk.
- Research shows it can be easier to break a bad habit when you’re on vacation, away from your normal reminders and triggers.
- A [study](#) involving movie-goers found that the simple change of eating popcorn with a different hand made popcorn-eating behavior less habitual.
- We can help change our responses by altering or avoiding whatever triggers negative self-talk.

## Identifying the Triggers of Your Negative Self-Talk and Forming Your Battle Plan

Ask yourself, “*When* am I most prone to damaging self-talk?”

- Is it when you’re tired? At the start of a new draft? When you’re looking at a blank screen? After being rejected? After seeing sales numbers? Reading a review?
- In the space below, write what you discover.

Next, ask yourself, “How can I avoid these triggers?” Be creative. There are some examples below.

- If reading a bad review causes negative emotions that spawn damaging self-talk, don’t read your reviews.
- If looking at a blank screen triggers thoughts like “I don’t have any ideas” or “This book will be terrible,” you’re going to have to be more creative in avoiding or disrupting that trigger. Starting your ideas on paper using a pen with a comfy grip may focus your thoughts on that pleasant tactile experience instead of on a blank screen.
- If seeing sales numbers triggers negative self-talk when they disappoint you, but you need to see them, figure out how you can *pre-empt* negative self-talk by starting with positive self-talk. For example, before opening the royalty report, read your story about when and how God gave you this task of writing. Then thank God for it and determine to be obedient no matter what. Ask God to give you His perspective on your writing career.

This process of identifying triggers and coming up with ways to avoid or pre-empt them will take time.

- There’s no rush to do it all in one sitting. Be creative. Be strategic. Get suggestions from others.
- In the space below (and on the next page), write down your ideas and solutions for avoiding specific triggers. This is your battle plan!

TRIGGER:

BATTLE PLAN:

To continue identifying triggers, ask yourself, “*What specifically am I most vulnerable about?*”

- Is it your craft? What specific area of craft? Is it your identity? Is it concern over finances? Is it your age? How long all this is taking?
- Where are the places the enemy has gotten a foothold? Where does he aim when he stabs? Look for patterns. Drill down to the underlying issues.
- It might help to journal so you can find patterns more easily.
- In the space below, write your discoveries.

Your process for creating your battle plan is the same for these triggers. When you know where your specific vulnerabilities are, you can take steps to shore up your defenses.

- You can better target the phrases you choose for your habit of positive self-talk by directly addressing your areas of vulnerability.
- You can find specific ways to pre-empt or avoid your triggers by changing up how you do things.
  - For example, if your age is an area of vulnerability, and seeing writers much younger than you getting contracts, winning awards, etc., can trigger damaging self-talk, you can help to avoid this trigger by:
    - forming a group of writing buddies closer to your age so you have less contact with younger writers for a while,
    - reading some biographies or stories about writers who began writing in their retirement years,
    - avoiding entering any contests or looking at winners' lists for a while, or
    - picking up a hobby—something totally new and different—so you see that you're a learner and grower no matter what your age.
- Again, be creative with your ideas. Be willing to experiment. Pray about them and ask God for direction.
- In the spaces below (and the next page) write your ideas and solutions for dealing with your specific triggers.

TRIGGER:

BATTLE PLAN:

TRIGGER:

BATTLE PLAN: