

SELF
TALK
SOUL TALK

Jennifer
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Part 1

THE LIFE-CHANGING POWER OF SOUL TALK

What is soul talk, and how does it work?

In these first four chapters, you'll discover that everybody practices self talk, but few of us actually take time to think about the things we say to ourselves. The process is so natural that we don't even notice it.

And therein lies the problem. We don't stop to consider whether the things we tell ourselves are even true. Amazingly, much of our self talk is false. It's based on lies that can keep us from entering fully into the lives God wants us to enjoy. But when we tell ourselves things that are true—when our words agree with God's Word—we can experience freedom like never before!

This kind of truthful self talk is what I call *soul talk*. It's speaking truth to the inner you—your soul.

Yes, our self talk, soul talk is powerful. The words we say go straight to the core of our being. They shape the way we think about ourselves. They influence our emotions, our thoughts, and our decisions. They resurface in our conversations with other people. They can spur us on to live meaningful, productive lives, or they can drag us down to lethargy and despair.

So how can you make your self talk productive? How can you replace the lies you may have been telling yourself with truthful soul talk? You're about to see that God has made a way for you to make sure the words you say to your soul are the words He would say. And then you can be sure they are true!

NOT SO WELL WITH MY SOUL

It is well with my soul.

That's been my story for years. I've spoken those words again and again. I've written about them. I've even sung them. As a speaker, writer, and musician, I seem to gravitate to this same theme whether my audience is 50 business people in a hotel conference room or 15,000 women in an arena. And I really mean it—it *is* well with my soul. These lyrics from a much-loved Protestant hymn echo the theme of my life story.

But here's the deal. The chorus demands that you boldly proclaim "It is well" no less than three times—whether you feel that way or not!

I wish I could count how many times I've stood and sung those words after speaking before thousands, only to sit right back down and feel a complete lack of wellness with my soul.

You should hear some of the unkind things I've said to myself.

You should have done a better job.

Listen to that speaker. She's SO much smarter than you.

Face it, girl, you'll never measure up.

Oh, my friend, I could go on and on. That's happened too many

times to count. As a result of so many personal attacks—me against me—it has not always been so well with my soul! I've sometimes told myself so many untruths, and I more than half believed them.

And not only when I was onstage. My steady flow of disapproving thoughts and self talk once formed a constant stream. I badgered, nagged, devalued, and said cutting words to myself. At times, all those dark, negative put-downs felt like a raging river, tossing me mercilessly until I thought I might drown in my own self-condemnation. At other times, they have seemed more like a constant drip-drip-dripping. Not loud and demanding, just a steady trickle of poison, creating an acidic wash of pessimism running through my mind. "The mind is its own place," John Milton wisely observed, "and in itself, can make Heaven of Hell, and a Hell of Heaven."

Never Good Enough

As a child, I could not escape the idea that whatever I did just wasn't good enough. I was a good girl with vast perfectionist tendencies—and painfully self-aware. And all those you're-not-good-enough thoughts pooled into an estuary in my mind from which the waters flowed.

During my teen years I changed a lot, and so did the content of my self talk. It got worse!

That's when I actually started calling myself names when I didn't measure up or when I made mistakes.

At the age of 15, I became legally blind due to a disease called retinitis pigmentosa. Even though I received that difficulty with grace and resolve, believe me, the extra challenges of the disability and the knowledge that blindness was inevitable brought even more opportunities for me to struggle with negative thoughts and destructive self talk.

You're never going to be independent.

You're so awkward.

People are staring at you.

Boys will never want to date you.

On and on it went. By the time I'd traveled through the decades of my twenties and thirties, I was swimming in a virtual ocean of accumulated self talk. All those years of faulty thinking and equally faulty self talking had begun to manifest in bouts of frustration, sometimes pushing me to the ragged edge of despair.

I lacked confidence and struggled with insecurity. I wasn't unhappy or depressed all the time or miserable most days. Absolutely not. I got married and was blossoming professionally. I became a mom and pursued life with passion, curiosity, and honesty. But an unseen undertow was trying to pull me backward, denying me the chance of really feeling free. A battle was being waged in my mind, and I never even realized its impact at the time.

We grow so accustomed to our own self talk that we don't even recognize its corrosive nature and the damage we're inflicting on our own souls. It's just normal for us.

Normal like cancer.

The truth is, our self talk actually begins to shape the life we live, affecting our very destiny. *What you think and say to yourself will impact the texture, color, and music of your life.* The song I mentioned earlier begins with these lyrics:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
 When sorrows like sea billows roll,
 Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
 "It is well, it is well with my soul."

Whatever your lot, do you want to be able to say it is well with your soul? I sure do. I know you do too. Knowing what to say to your soul is one of the most reliable ways to make sure it remains well. Words are extremely powerful—even the ones you speak to yourself.

Over the years, I have gradually learned what to say when I talk to myself, and that has truly made all the difference in my life. After

years of struggling beneath the weight of my own slander and lies, I have learned to speak truth to my soul.

It's what I call *soul talk*. And from this page forward, that's the term I will use most often in this book.

My Thought Closet

It all began early one morning as I wiped the sleep from my eyes. As I gained my consciousness, I was almost immediately bombarded with a deluge of unexpected, unsolicited quandaries and problems. Before my feet even hit the floor, I had scolded myself about the poor parenting job I was doing with my teenage son and had questioned whether my toddler was getting enough attention.

I hadn't intended to start my day with these thoughts.

What happened? I wondered.

Dragging myself to the kitchen to fix breakfast, I felt the old frustration rising within me. As I toasted some Pop-Tarts and scrambled some eggs, I continued to deliberate. *What's wrong with me?*

My oldest son left for school, and I sat at the kitchen table, sipping a cup of hot tea and trying to unknot a big tangle of emotions.

Was my brain simply an involuntary muscle, twitching and cramping, causing me to think on things that were not of my choosing? Why didn't I have control of the gray matter located beneath my color-treated hair and between my own pierced ears?

I seem to have a secret closet tucked somewhere in the hallways of my mind. A thought closet. And what I had been storing in that closet wasn't good at all: shelves and racks and bins full of hidden thoughts, secret insecurities, lies, illusions, and reminders of former failures. How did they get there? Why can't I get rid of them?

Without my consent, my mind keeps reaching into the dark corners of that closet to retrieve the troublesome contents I have inadvertently stored away over the years. The boxes have labels like these:

*You're not good enough.
 You're not the wife you could be.
 You're not a good mom.
 You should have done a better job.*

One unsightly shelf was stacked high with bins full of junky feelings and beliefs...

*It's all about me.
 I can't do it; it's impossible.
 I'll always be this way.
 Nobody really cares.*

Some things in life are only truly discovered through pondering, prayer, and a steaming cup of Earl Grey. My soul-talk revelation was one of them. As I questioned my seemingly helpless state, I felt as if God Himself reminded me that if I don't control my thoughts, my thoughts *will* control me. And the only way to get any kind of handle on those thoughts is to monitor what I tell myself.

Somehow, I had to stop my mind's reflex of continually rummaging through those boxes of ugly, ill-fitting thoughts and words. Or maybe I just needed to fill my closet with some more appealing, better-fitting self talk!

Hmmm...“Peace like a river” was about to be attending my way.

Let's Talk Soul Talk

Let's just be honest. We all talk to ourselves. Some of us have full-blown conversations—right out loud. Others of us just mutter silent phrases now and then. But we all engage in either destructive self talk or helpful soul talk.

Our *soul talk* can finally change the contents of our thought closets. If we want the right things on those shelves and in those bins, we have to tell ourselves right things. My faith has led me to the Bible to find what to say to my soul. And speaking the truths I've found in the pages of Scripture has turned my thought closet

from a prison into an oasis of freedom! No sermons—just sensible soul talk!

Wherever you find people, you'll find all kinds of self talk—good and bad. And since the pages of Scripture are filled with the stories of real flesh-and-blood people, you'll see it there too. Both Deborah the prophetess and David the psalmist talked to themselves—and they weren't the only ones. Several other psalmists and even some New Testament characters were “caught on tape” having conversations with themselves. In fact, when many of them spoke, they knew very well they were addressing their own souls.

What did they say? What did they allow to be stored in their thought closets? Here's a sampling:

- ~ “Awake, my soul” (Psalm 57:8).
- ~ “My soul...put your hope in God” (Psalm 42:5,11; 43:5).
- ~ “I have stilled and quieted my soul” (Psalm 131:2).
- ~ “O my soul...forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2).
- ~ “Be at rest once more, O my soul” (Psalm 116:7).
- ~ “March on, O my soul; be strong” (Judges 5:21).
- ~ “Praise the LORD, O my soul” (Psalm 103:1; 104:1; 146:1).

Now that's what I call soul talk! In contemporary vernacular, these seven soul-talk statements might sound a little like this...tune in, look up, calm down, look back, chill out, press on, and lift up.

Unlike David, Deborah, and the others, we don't usually make obvious “O my soul” pronouncements when we talk to ourselves. We use silent words instead. Some psychologists and neuroscientists have concluded that everybody maintains a continuous, ongoing silent dialogue, or stream of self talk, of between 150 and 300 words a minute. These are grouped into 45,000 to 51,000 thoughts each day.¹ Most of those thoughts are neutral or harmless, such as *Where did I put my keys?* or *I need to go to the cleaners today.*

But another small yet powerful percentage of such self-directed speech packs quite a punch. The thoughts can be accurate or inaccurate, constructive or destructive, right or wrong, and they matter a lot more than remembering to drop off your dry cleaning.

Our soul-talk thoughts seem to be etched into our brains as they travel neural pathways and carve out comfortable grooves for themselves along the way. Put less technically, we fill our thought closets one thought at a time, one silent word at a time, one utterance of soul talk at a time.

The thoughts that run through our minds become the inventory we store away in our closets. And out of that inventory we daily draw truth or error—powerful, life-shaping beliefs that go on to influence both our feelings and our actions. And the reality is, once in the closet...forever in the closet.

Our words are powerful. Especially the words we say to ourselves. That's why we need to take a peek into our own closets and see what's lining those shelves.

Let's Sneak a Peek

After my most recent move, I vowed that I would never again buy clothes I wasn't totally in love with just because they were on sale. The reason? My closet was full of clothes I seldom wore but was hesitant to part with. Once something hung in my closet, I felt strangely attached to it and responsible for it. After all, I bought it. Even though I wouldn't dare wear those fuchsia and orange floral pants, they were mine. Once in my closet, forever in my life.

Our thought closets are much the same. They are crammed with everything we've placed there over the years; some of it is worthy and wonderful, but lots of it is ugly, outdated, out of line, and out of place.

Wise shoppers stock their closets with good wardrobe choices, and we must do the same with the things we say to our souls because each thought gets shoved in the closet until we recall it. We must

Speak truth to our souls because we seldom forget what we have stored away.

Isn't it funny that as we age, many of us can't remember the simplest things—like our children's names or why we left one room and walked into another? The older I get, I rarely get my boys' names correct on the first try. Most of my conversations with them start with "Clayton—I mean, Connor," or "Connor...uh, I mean, Clayton."

I've actually mixed together cake batter, poured it into the baking pan, and then returned to the kitchen half an hour later to check on my culinary delight only to find that I placed it in the refrigerator instead of the oven.

We forget the simplest things, but when accessing our thought closets and their accumulated contents, our minds are like steel traps. We have the appalling ability to remember all the wrong things at all the wrong times. Like a finely tuned GPS, we can locate just the right memory of failure, the perfect insecurity, or the timeliest untruth—just when we don't need it most!

That's why we need to sneak a peek into our closets. Think about it. What hangs in yours? Does it supply you with truth? Is your thought closet full of all you need to live the life you desire? If not, don't fret, my friend. You can get control of those unprofitable thoughts in your closet.

In the coming chapters, you will see just how to do that.

Inventory Adjustment

It's time we take inventory. The stale contents of our overstuffed closets should not be the source of our musings. It's time to update the wardrobe. Now is your opportunity to fill your closet with timely, attractive truth with which you can clothe yourself: fashionable, well-fitting, freeing, and fabulous truth.

"Be transformed," St. Paul tells us, "by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

Instead of drawing from a dilapidated closet, full of thoughts that just don't fit, we need a wardrobe jam-packed with healthy soul talk.

My friend, you are a reflection of the way you think. Wise King Solomon hit the nail on the head when he said, "For as he thinks within himself, so he is" (Proverbs 23:7 NASB). What you hang in your closet is what you will clothe yourself with. Your soul talk will affect who you are.

Because your thoughts strongly influence you, you must learn to govern them with some truthful soul talk. This will start you on the path of right thinking. It will lead you to unknotted, productive feelings and free you up to live the life you long for.

You may have occasionally laughed at people who talk to themselves, imagining that they were a few bricks short of a full load. Maybe—and maybe not! It actually all depends on what they were telling themselves! Those self talkers might be further ahead in the game of life than you might imagine.

When you speak truth to your soul, you'll live out the truth. Your soul talk really can help it become well with your soul.

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Soul-Talk Questions to Ponder
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1. What does the soundtrack of your self talk most often sound like—condemning, encouraging, or neutral?
 2. How do you feel about the contents of your thought closet? Are the contents supplying you with what you need to live the life you desire?
 3. Are you willing to try some soul talk from the Bible?
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At the end of each chapter, take a moment to visit selftalksoultalk.com to go a little deeper, have a little fun, and stay connected. If you and I are just becoming acquainted, go to the website, watch a snippet of my story, and tell me yours.