

AN INVITATION TO TRY LIVING SOFTLY AND TENDERLY

CHOOSING A DELICATE AND DIFFERENT KIND OF DECEMBER



PRESENTED BY STOP BREATHE BELIEVE® & DIANNE MORRIS JONES

What would it even mean to be invited to try living softly and tenderly – especially during December amidst the hustle and bustle of the holiday season?

I love the writing of Aundi Kolber, a therapist and the author of Try Softer. She relates that after meeting with her supervisor and sharing how worn out and tired she was, he said, “I’m not asking you to stop caring, just to change the way you are caring.” And then he said, “What I mean is...what if – just for a change – instead of trying harder, you tried...softer?” Kolber advocates, “Learning to try softer is not a onetime event but a way we learn to be with ourselves.”

When our culture has communicated the messages to go fast and hard, do it all perfect, etc. – what if we pause? What if we take an exquisite pause and walk softly and tenderly towards a different way?

How could we try softer by becoming more attentive observers of what is going on with our bodies? With our minds and our thoughts? With our feelings? With our responses?

SOFTLY AND TENDERLY

BY ROGER C. JONES

Tough, rough, and demanding often make our mark on the playground, in a game of sport, or perhaps at the office. But kind treatment, rendered *softly* and *tenderly*, offers healing to the broken, the despised, and the downtrodden.

Ecstatic parents enraptured by their newborn, the lioness dotting over her three cubs, and a mama grizzly cuddling her young bears paint exquisite portraits of *softness* and *tenderness*.

When a friend shares our pain, when an ally truly listens to our grief, our despair, our heartbreak—we feel the *softness* and *tenderness* of being well heard, well loved.

Alas, too often we criticize, even condemn ourselves. Our internal dialogue haunts us: You're not enough—you failed—you're worthless. Now let us summon self-compassion and practice treating ourselves in this way—*softly* and *tenderly*.



DAY 1



Photo taken in Dallas, Texas.

DAY 1

“We must combine the toughness of the serpent with the softness of the dove, a tough mind and a tender heart.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Today as we invite *trying* to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how might we combine toughness and softness in our life? How can we lean into softness as we enter the month of December?

DAY 2



Photo taken in Costa Rica.

DAY 2

“Love men and women not for their strength but their softness, not for their fullness but their hunger, not for their plenty but their need.”

- Anais Nin

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, what might soft love and tender love look like?

DAY 3



Photo taken at Los Angeles Zoo, Los Angeles, California.

DAY 3

“The air is all softness.”

- John Keats

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, what questions of curiosity might we ask ourselves regarding how to live softly and tenderly?

DAY 4



Photo taken in Descanso Gardens, Flintridge, California.

DAY 4

“If you would fall into any extreme, let it be on the side of gentleness. The human mind is so constructed that it resists rigor, and yields to softness.”

- Saint Francis de Sales

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how might we notice what would calm our heart?

DAY 5



Photo taken on Lopez Island, Washington.

DAY 5

“Water is fluid, soft, and yielding. But water will wear away rock, which is rigid and cannot yield. As a rule, whatever is fluid, soft, and yielding will overcome whatever is rigid and hard. This is another paradox: what is soft is strong.”

- Laozi

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, in what ways do we think of being soft as weak? How can we shift our perspective to honoring the courage and bravery of softness?

DAY 6



Photo taken in Dallas, Texas.

DAY 6

“Openness and softness of heart loves what it knows.”

- John de Ruiter

**Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly
by choosing a delicate and different kind of December,
how might we open up our heart?**

DAY 7



Photo taken in West Des Moines, Iowa.

DAY 7

“When tough times come, it is particularly important to offset them with much gentle softness. Be a pillow.”

- Vera Nazarian

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how might we look at our perceptions in a fresh way?

When Sterling, our silver lab, was a puppy she loved to go hiking with us in the snowy days of December at Walnut Woods in West Des Moines, Iowa. On this particular day, the softness of the freshly falling snow was so beautiful and elegant as it landed on her soft fur and even on her precious little eye brows and whiskers. How might we invite softness in to this moment, this hour, this day?

DAY 8



Photo taken in Lubbock, Texas.

DAY 8

“I will love you always. When this hair is all gone, I will still love you. When the smooth softness of youth is replaced by the delicate softness of age, I will still want to touch your skin. When your face is full of the lines of every smile you have ever smiled, of every surprise I have seen flash through your eyes, when every tear you have ever cried has left its mark upon your face, I will treasure you all the more, because I was there to see it all. I will share your life with you, and I will love you until the last breath leaves your body or mine.”

- a personalization of a quote by Laurell K. Hamilton

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, what does it look like to care for another softly and tenderly? For me, I think of Mom and Dad, who lived and loved softly and tenderly towards one another. Mom was so loving and caring for Dad through his many surgeries and experiences with Parkinson Disease. Dad was so loving and supportive towards Mom in her determination to love her family in such an extravagant way.

Who might have modeled this for you?

DAY 9



Photo taken in Amarillo, Texas.

DAY 9

“Fearlessness comes from working with the softness of
the human heart.”
- Chogyam Trungpa

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly
by choosing a delicate and different kind of December,
how might we share that with another?

This image of our daughter, Jill and her friend Sarah
exemplified the softness of the heart. What a sweet
friendship they had with one another and what a precious
moment of sharing their ballet adventures together.

Who might we share our fears and concerns with to allow
our hearts to live more fully open?

DAY 10



Photo taken in West Des Moines, Iowa.

DAY 10

“I have witnessed the softening of the hardest of hearts by a simple smile.”
- Goldie Hawn

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, who might we offer a smile? How have we experienced a smile being a softening?

This image of me and Catherine Knepper, the editor of my book, *Stop Breathe Believe* is an example of a ‘heart opening’ friendship. Catherine gave me courage to write from my heart, to share with the world, to be authentic and open in my writing. I smile when I think of the days of us sitting on my living room couch – sometimes laughing, sometimes sharing deeply to provoke tears – figuring out how to birth this book into being.

DAY 11



Photo taken in Itasca, Illinois.

DAY 11

“The softer your heart is the less that your past is forming your present and your future. When there is openness and softness of heart, what forms the present and the future is not your past but the reality of your own being.”

- John de Ruiter

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, can we find time to think about our being? How might we welcome the deepest parts of our being today?

DAY 12

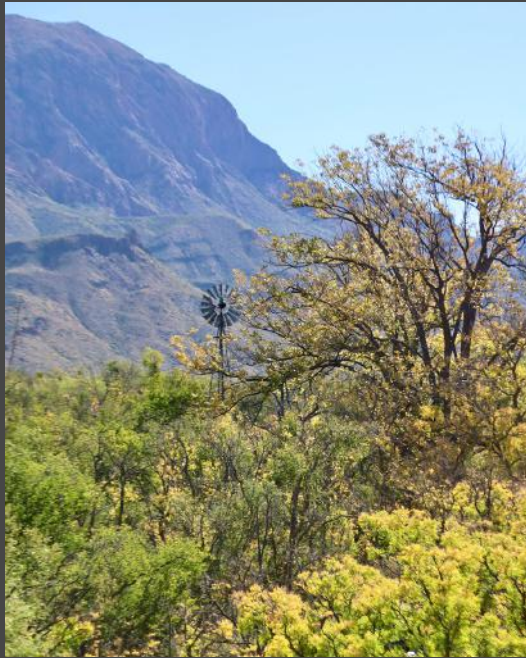


Photo taken in Big Bend National Park, Texas.

DAY 12

“Harshness vanished. A sudden softness has replaced the meadows' wintry grey. Little rivulets of water changed their singing accents. Tendernesses, hesitantly, reach toward the earth from space, and country lanes are showing these unexpected subtle risings that find expression in the empty trees.”

- Rainer Maria Rilke

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how might we look to nature to help us?

DAY 13



Photo taken in Dallas, Texas.

DAY 13

“Maybe the most important teaching is to lighten up and relax. It's such a huge help in working with our crazy mixed-up minds to remember that what we're doing is unlocking a softness that is in us and letting it spread. We're letting it blur the sharp corners of self-criticism and complaint.”

- Pema Chodron

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, what might it look like to lighten up and relax? Who might we share our struggle of self-criticism and harsh self-talk with?

DAY 14



Photo taken in Walnut Woods State Park, West Des Moines, Iowa.

DAY 14

**“Softly the evening came
with the sunset.”**

— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

**Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly
by choosing a delicate and different kind of December,
how do we lean into softness? How might we navigate
softly and tenderly into the landscape of our heart during
the holidays?**

DAY 15



Photo taken in Big Bend National Park, Texas.

DAY 15

“May the Sun bring you by day, may the moon softly restore you by night, may the rain wash away your worries, may the breeze blow new strength into your being, may you walk gently through the world and know its beauty all the days of your life.”

– Apache Blessing

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how might we walk gently today?

DAY 16



Photo taken in West Des Moines, Iowa.

DAY 16

**“Tread softly, breathe peacefully, laugh hysterically.”
- Nelson Mandela**

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how might we think about how we tread, walk, rush, race, walk through December? Might we consider thanking our precious feet for carrying us along our journey each day?

DAY 17



Photo taken in Peru.

DAY 17

“Tenderness and kindness are not signs of weakness and despair, but manifestations of strength and resolution.”

– Khalil Gibran

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how might tenderness and kindness look like strength for us?

DAY 18



Photo taken at Fort Worth Zoo, Fort Worth, Texas.

DAY 18

“Our greatest strength lies in the gentleness and tenderness of our heart.”
- Rumi

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how can we pay attention to the layers, the beauty and the depth of our heart?

This image has multiple layers. Although the beauty of the peacock showing off its amazing, colorful feathers is a lovely image. The layer that captures my heart is the reflection in the background of Justin, our son, a man of strength with a gentle and tender heart, pushing my Dad in a wheelchair. Dad, had a zest for life and a love of nature that was admired by many. Although Parkinson Disease diminished his ability to do all that he could physically do, it did not stop him from wanting to go to the zoo with the grandkids, to admire the peacock’s beautiful feathers and to display an abundant beauty of love to others, much like the peacock.

DAY 19



Photo taken at Dallas Zoo, Dallas, Texas.

DAY 19

“There is no charm equal to tenderness of heart.”

- Jane Austen

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how might we be tender with our heart? Tender self-compassion is one of the most challenging things we can do – AND one of the most loving gifts we can give ourselves. What might a gift of self-compassion look like today?

DAY 20



Photo taken in Costa Rica.

DAY 20

**“Tenderness is greater proof of love than the most passionate of
vows.”**

- Marlene Dietrich

**Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by
choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how might we
reflect tenderness with those we love.**

**One day as we were in Costa Rica, this view stopped me in my
tracks. The image of a bridge – reflecting a duplicate bridge in the
water’s reflection – is a reminder to me that when I can have the
soft and tender response to myself amidst the hustle and bustle of
the holidays, that I have a higher propensity to reflect that level of
soft and tender response to others. How can I love someone in a
tender, gentle, compassionate way today?**

DAY 21



Photo taken in Dallas, Texas.

DAY 21

**“Love doesn't mean doing extraordinary or heroic things.
It means knowing how to do ordinary things with
tenderness.”**

- Jean Vanier

**Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly
by choosing a delicate and different kind of December,
how might we do an ordinary thing in a tender way?**

DAY 22



Photo taken in Terlingua, Texas.

DAY 22

“There is nothing as strong as tenderness, And nothing as tender as true strength.”

- Saint Francis de Sales

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how can we consider the paradox between strength and tenderness?

DAY 23



Photo taken in Lubbock, Texas.

DAY 23

**“There never was any heart truly great and generous,
that was not also tender and compassionate.”**

- Robert Frost

**Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly
by choosing a delicate and different kind of December,
who might we offer the gift of human touch to today?**

DAY 24



Photo taken in Dallas, Texas.

DAY 24

**“A mother's arms are made of tenderness and children
sleep soundly in them.”**

- Victor Hugo

**Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly
by choosing a delicate and different kind of December,
how might we lean into tenderness?**

DAY 25



Photo taken at Fort Worth Botanical Center, Fort Worth, Texas.

DAY 25

“Beauty comes from tenderness.”

- Katherine Center

**Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly
by choosing a delicate and different kind of December,
how might we share the beauty of tenderness with
another?**

DAY 26



Photo taken in Dallas, Texas.

DAY 26

“When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand.”

- Henri Nouwen

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how do we pay attention to those who “see” us, who give witness to our stories, our life?

DAY 27



Photo taken in Dallas, Texas.

DAY 27

**“We are hungry for tenderness,
in a world where everything abounds
we are poor of this feeling
which is like a caress
for our heart
we need these small gestures
that make us feel good.**

**Tenderness
is a disinterested and generous love,
that does not ask anything else
to be understood and appreciated.”**

- Alda Merini

**Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly
by choosing a delicate and different kind of December,
how might we pay attention to those who understand us?**

DAY 28



Photo taken in Lubbock, Texas.

DAY 28

“Let tenderness pour from your eyes, the way sun gazes warmly on earth.”

- Hafez

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, who might we share the gift of a tender gaze with?

DAY 29



Photo taken in Seattle, Washington.

DAY 29

“Be kind to each other. It is better to commit faults with gentleness than to work miracles with unkindness.”

- Mother Teresa

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how might we build on the tenets of kindness and gentleness?

DAY 30



Photo taken at Dallas Zoo, Dallas, Texas.

DAY 30

“In a gentle way, you can shake the world.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December, how do we reflect on gentleness, softness, tenderness as a practice for our every day?

DAY 31



Photo taken in Nepal.

DAY 31

“Meditation is about seeing clearly the body that we have, the mind that we have, the domestic situation that we have, the job that we have, and the people who are in our lives. It's about seeing how we react to all these things. It's seeing our emotions and thoughts just as they are right now, in this very moment, in this very room, on this very seat. It's about not trying to make them go away, not trying to become better than we are, but just seeing clearly with precision and gentleness.”

- Pema Chodron

Today as we invite trying to live more softly and tenderly by choosing a delicate and different kind of December – and looking into the new year, how might we choose to “see” with precision and gentleness?