

Practicing Self-Care in Christian Ministry

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This course will highlight the importance of persons in ministry practicing self-care. It will show the student what scripture says about taking care of oneself as one carries out God's work. The course is ideal for pastors, missionaries, evangelists, ministry leaders, and christian business owners/marketplace leaders who are in a position to train their staff and workers as well as minister to their congregation (for pastors) on the importance and benefits of self-care.

The term "self-care" is often heard today, mostly in the western world across multiple disciplines, especially the helping professions such as healthcare workers, caregivers, clergy, counselors, and social workers. In today's society, more people are experiencing burn out. Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed and emotionally drained. For example, a church or business leader experiencing burnout may, at some point, be unable to efficiently do any work or serve others as a result of constant exhaustion.

Some may assume that as Christians, we are supposed to ignore ourselves and put others' needs above ours, but that is not what scripture states. The Bible does instruct us not just to seek our own good, but also the good of others. 1 Corinthians 10:24. In order to help and care for others, we must ensure that we are in good health (not just physically but mentally, spiritually, and emotionally). Thus, in this course, the student will be able to understand what practicing self-care looks like and how it can benefit the individual, the business, the local church, and the community.

What is Self-Care?

Self-Care is simply the practice of caring for one's overall wellbeing, especially in stressful times. Unfortunately, many of us are not intentional with our health, and even when the body is trying to communicate with us, we choose to ignore it, and eventually, the body breaks down. Let's face it; there are situations when one needs to ask for help. It has nothing to do with being weak or lazy; it is about what you are able and not able to handle. For example, a pastor of a fast-growing church who is also trying to support

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his family by working a part-time job (Bi-vocational Minister) and is also volunteering in his community will eventually begin encountering a high level of stress if he does not ask for help. We see a case in scripture where Jethro, Moses's father in law advised Moses to select individuals who will assist him in judging the people's cases. Why? in that way, he does not suffer fatigue or exhaustion at the end of each day) See Exodus 18:14-26. How about the case of a single mom of three, juggling work, probably school, and raising the children all by herself will ultimately experience burnout and negative stress if she does not share the load. (i.e., knowing when to ask for help) At some point, she will require some respite to take care of herself. Self-care contributes to living a balanced life. Later in the course, we will look at some self-help strategies or tips to take care of one's self.

What is Self-Care, NOT?

It is not:

- Being Selfish or Self-centered
- Being Self Indulgent (overeating, over-exercising, over shopping).
- Isolating yourself (an excuse to distance yourself from others).
- Doing whatever you want with no accountability.
- Laziness (not an excuse not to do chores around the house, have your regular quiet time, etc.).

When is Self-Care Needed?

Self-care, many times is required when one begins to experience stress. Earlier I mentioned negative stress. Yes, not all stress is bad, but before we go further, let us define what stress is.

Definition of Stress

It is the body's general response to any intense physical, emotional, or mental demand placed on it by oneself or others. Stress, specifically chronic stress, is threatening millions of people who face long work hours and challenging home situations. Here in the United States, it is not uncommon to see people working 60 hours a week, 12-14-

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hour workdays; we rarely make time for rest. Stress is most often attached to a particular thing or situation that we find challenging or frightening.

Examples of stressors in a person's life include:

- Work/Business/Ministry
- Relationships (marriage, extended family, coworkers, etc.).
- Traffic
- School

Some Symptoms of Stress

1. Increased breathing
2. Increase in heart rate
3. Tightened Muscles
4. Anger
5. Forgetfulness
6. Anxiety
7. Mood swings
8. Irritability
9. Over/Undereating

Positive Stress vs. Negative Stress

Now, there are two categories of stress: positive and negative stress.

Positive stress (i.e., Eustress) is the body's normal and healthy response to a tense event. It is typically felt when a person is focused on completing a particular task or project. He or she is motivated and excited about completing the project.

For example, a person's first day on the job, a woman planning her wedding, a graduate student working on his doctoral thesis, and looking forward to completing it, a couple building their dream home.

Negative stress (i.e., Distress) happens when a person feels unable to perform or to cope with a situation. The body responds to a long term or severe event in a person's life. It causes anxiety or concern and can lead to mental and physical problems.

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Example of such is the loss of a loved one, loss of a job or business, domestic violence situation, divorce.

Regardless of what type of stress a person is encountering, practicing self-care is crucial to the person's overall wellbeing. As a church/ministry worker or leader, it is necessary to make sure the day to day activities is balanced.

Six Categories of Self Care

There are about seven to eight types of self-care, but we are going to identify the most common ones.

- Physical Self Care
- Spiritual Self Care
- Psychological Self Care
- Emotional Self Care
- Relationship Self Care
- Professional Self Care

1. Physical Self- Care

There are several activities that church ministry leaders and workers can participate in to enhance their overall physical wellbeing and mental health. They include:

- Eating regularly and healthy
- Exercising and engaging in activities such as rock climbing, rafting, swimming, etc.
- Getting adequate sleep/rest.
- Engaging in sexual activity (pertains to married couples only).
- Getting a massage/ Spending a Day at the Spa.
- Volunteering

2. Spiritual Self-Care

This has to do with the values and beliefs that are important in one's life. It guides every aspect of their being. For us Christians, this is our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Activities include:

- Reflecting on your relationship with God.

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- Connecting with your church and community
- Connecting with small bible study or home fellowship groups
- Quiet time (prayer/meditation of the word, praise & worship, etc.).
- Identifying God's purpose for your life.
- Volunteering
- Attending retreats, conferences, other ministry events for spiritual growth.

3. Psychological Self-Care

This category has to do with learning new skills, talents, things in general. Examples of activities include:

- Learning or teaching a new skill
- Writing in a journal/diary
- Taking time away from electronics (detoxing from technology)
- Spending time reflecting on your life
- Being able to say "no" to extra responsibilities, duties

4. Emotional Self-Care

This has to do with allowing yourself to feel. Being empathetic and developing compassion for others and yourself. Example of this are:

- Loving your Neighbors as yourself, i.e., it is important to love God and yourself first before you can love others as scripture commands us. Appreciate who you are in Christ.
- Permitting yourself to cry when needed.
- Spending time with others
- Permitting yourself to laugh (He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy). Job 8:21
- Being aware of your boundaries
- Staying in contact with important people in your life
- Being able to appreciate God's hand in your life (offer praise and adoration).
- Learning when to say "No."

5. Relationship Self Care

Also referred to as social self-care involves one's network of relationships and community support. Individuals want to build a network of caring and supportive people that will be there for them in both the good and challenging times.

Examples of this include are:

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- Meeting new people
- Making time to see or call/text friends
- Being intentional with your time with your spouse, children, and relatives
- Staying in contact with your long-distance friends, relatives, etc.
- Asking for help when you need it.
- Staying away from toxic relationships
- Making time to reply to emails, texts, letters (snail mail).
- Sharing your fears, concerns, successes with a trusted person(s) within your network.

6. Professional Self Care

Also referred to as workplace self-care involves how a person takes care of one's self in the workplace. The person wants to ensure that there are clear professional boundaries. The workplace is the person's place of employment (if you are an employee) or business (you are the business owner). Examples of this include:

- Taking your lunch breaks
- Understanding your job role/position
- Identifying projects or tasks that you find rewarding.
- Knowing your limits (boundaries) with clients, coworkers, and employees (if you are the boss/owner/pastor).
- Taking time to interact with coworkers healthily.
- Setting up your workspace/office in a way that makes you comfortable
- Taking time to appreciate and reward your employees/workers (for ministry leaders/ business owners).

- Participating in ongoing training programs.
- Striving for work/life balance. Try not to neglect your relationships, rest, and make time for clean fun.

Self-Care Strategies

As a christian in ministry or service for the Lord, self-care helps prevent burnout, and it is what helps keep you connected to God, who is the creator and the Source of everything.

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Several of these tips are already mentioned within the different categories mentioned earlier.

- Take advantage of massage therapy
- Exercise, sign up for dance classes, swimming classes, attend a gym
- Laugh – It is good for the soul
- Do stretches at home
- Eat properly
- Talk to a friend
- Talk to a Spiritual mentor/coach/counselor
- Join a support group or start one
- Journaling
- Do something creative
- Have fun with your family
- Ask for respite care
- Read Inspiration Books & Literature
- Praying and Meditation on the word of God
- Listen to uplifting music
- Go for a walk
- Take a nap
- Do crossword puzzles and play other games with family or friends
- Watch inspiring movies

What The Bible Says About Self-Care

Now the Bible doesn't directly address self-care, but it does offer guidance for understanding the role of our overall health and wellness.

Here are some scripture verses to support practicing self-care

On the seventh day, God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation. (Genesis 2:2-3).

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So, you must honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray – (Luke 5:16).

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"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41-42).

And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. (Mark 6:31).

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10).

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. (John 15:4). Abide here means to "rest."

Conclusion:

The critical thing to understand about self-care is that you are not doing it alone, and it is not just about you. Regardless of your position in ministry or the marketplace (i.e., christian leaders in the secular workplace), you are a vessel, a servant of God who must work alongside the Holy Spirit to ensure that you care for yourself the way the Lord wants you. Caring for oneself means ensuring that one is doing most or all that is mentioned in this study guide. Remember that the Lord God alone has the power for real and lasting healing and wholeness, and it is important as His vessel that you tap into the Source for all that is required to live a healthy and balanced life.