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99 SELF-CARE TECHNIQUES FOR CHRISTIANS

a self-assessment using coping skills
to reduce stress and increase faith



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The concept of self-care is a dynamic one. For some, it's something that is a daily part of life where exercise, morning meditation, prayerful drive to work, and intentional downtime with family or by oneself is not only routine and consistent, but a necessary part of a healthy and productive day. Others find it as a part of a reoccurring goal that is dreamed up as the new year comes but broken somewhere between fifteen and sixty days into the new year. Many feel bad about taking time for themselves, to the point that the World Health Organization has classified the term burnout as a recognized occupational phenomenon.¹

Within the Christian culture, we are no better, in some ways having made things worse. As pastors who would lead by example, a study was done this year with 17% of pastors under 25 years old, 40% of pastors 25 to 40 year old, 36% of pastors older than 40 years old feeling burnt out.² Further, many Christians shy away from the idea of even talking about self-care because they worry that in doing so, you are putting yourself before God in a perverse understanding of theology that would say that unresolved stress or unbound depression may actually be a sign we are suffering for Christ. It's seen as putting your desires before God's. But this simply is not the case. Laura Howe has a great quote about what self-care is in the eyes of a counselor and Christian.

But the goal of self-care is not to indulge in and fulfill selfish desires. The goal is to live out the great commandment found in Matthew 22:36-40, which commands us to love one another as we love ourselves. Taking time to care for yourself and refuel is not about whether or not you deserve it. It is about God wanting to love on His children. He wants you to know Him and He wants to refresh you.³

Marshall Segal has an article on John Piper's website that tries to secularize and condemn self-care poorly as it takes a coping skill out of the whole treatment modality in order to offer a spiritual counter-argument but has a great quote that I agree with at the end and wanted to extract: "Any habit or activity can be a means of joy, peace, and healing, but only if it brings you to God."⁴

¹ World Health Organization, "Burn-out an 'occupational phenomenon': International Classification of Diseases." 28 May 2019. <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>

² Faithlife, "2021 Pastoral Mental Health Report." July 2021. <https://grow.faithlife.com/pastoral-mental-health-report>

³ Hope Made Strong, "Keys to Resilience – Self Care." <https://hopemadestrong.org/keys-to-resilience-self-care/>

⁴ Segal, Marshall, "The Insanity of 'Self-Care.'" 14 March 2016. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-insanity-of-self-care>

I think the difficulty is that people see *worldly self-care* and *Christian self-care* but if we say God is in all things and makes all things for his good, then we should be redeeming this area psychology and not compartmentalize them versus us. So self-care such as going for a walk is a Christian self-care technique that is simply going to be labelled as self-care without a Christian adjective.

Self-care is not about avoiding your feelings, turning God off so you can only think about yourself, escaping reality, or doing things to “manage your emotions” that leads to unhealthy addictions such as substance misuse, consuming too much television, or overeating. In fact, self-care is not a replacement for worship with God or the need for true clinical counseling due to a significant or severe mental illness. I’ve heard it said that self-care is about stewardship, discipline, and boundaries and to do so, you need to be practicing it regularly and not waiting until it needs done as a quick fix.

Self-care is about finding substance that gives life, energy, purpose, resiliency, and sustainability: in community, in wisdom, in rest and peace, and in God. We must nourish ourselves in all areas, working on ourselves and being diligent to give space to this even when time is short, the desire is low, or it is unenjoyable. We see this with our dental work by needing to go in for check-ups even when we do not have cavities, go to the gym and exercise to maintain our health when we are not feeling up to it, and keep up with friends or family to maintain strong relationships even when you had a long workday. Certainly, each person is different in how much we need, but we all need connections.

(Side note: There is so much more that can be said about this topic that goes beyond this simple assessment and inventory of self-care techniques, including that while self-care is important, it is not required for Christians. Because we are filled with the Holy Spirit and are children of God, we have his wonderful power when God decides to provide. This is why Jonah could last so long, why Elijah was so powerful, and why Moses did all the miracles for God’s kingdom. So, if you or someone you love has a deficiency or barrier that prevents some self-care, ask God to provide or show you what to do next.)

The following assessment will first give you a long list of ideas you can look to better yourself in the day to day. Nobody does all of this perfect, that’s not the goal, but instead to work on getting incrementally better as we grow closer to God. Secondly, we help you within the assessment identify your areas of interest to better note what is missing and what more you could do. We will take the bio-psycho-social-spiritual route that is presented in counseling but integrate as much Christian practices into our daily living.

We pray that you find that peace, rest, joy, and connection with God. We hope this also puts you in a place to be a better parent, spouse, child of your parents, volunteer at church, pour out love to your community through service, employee at work or student at school, and witness for Christ in your community.

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Self-Assessment of Self-Care



Not only do we want to give you a list of self-care techniques for Christians, but we also want to give you a way to assess and find another way to take care of yourself as well as what is already working for you. The assessment below is designed to work for both. So this will require you to do the first route and then come back and re-assess for yourself in a different way. Follow up allow with the assessment below using these instructions:

1. Go through the list of *99 Self-Care Ideas for Christians* and when you come to a skill you have done in the last year, put a check (✓) in the box. If it is a skill you enjoy, put a plus sign after the check (✓+), and if it is a skill you did not enjoy, put a minus behind the check (✓-).
2. Go back through the list of *99 Self-Care Ideas for Christians* and when you come to a skill you have never done before, circle the box (○). If it is a skill you want to try, put a check (✓) in the circle (○). If you do not want to try it, put an 'X' in the circle (○).
3. You will still have boxes that have not been circled or checked. You can certainly go back through those and identify if you would like to try them as well.

Your list should look something like this:

- Go to your church and pray over the sanctuary.
- Walk a prayer Labrynth, praying for your family, church, community, or nation.
- + Write a letter of prayer, thanksgiving, and support to a missionary you or your church supports.
- Write a letter to God.
- Create a prayer journal.

When you are done, we want you to focus on the items that are circled and have a check mark on them which indicate ideas you want to try out and have not been able to get to as well as ideas you have the check followed by plus (✓+) that indicate skills you have done and work well for you.

The check with plus (✓+) is a low-hanging fruit that if you do not have regularly implemented into your life, you need to do so now. In fact, we encourage you to go through your list and highlight the first two that you need to add back into your routine right away. Keep on looking to add more and more of them as you have time, energy, and people to keep supporting you.

If you are practicing all the ideas that are checked with a plus (✓+) or feel you have enough self-care and are not concerned, consider going to some of the items that you have circled with a check and find some new self-care skills that may be as good as the others. Again, go through all of the circled ideas that have a check in them and

highlight with a different color at least two ideas you want to try out in the next couple of weeks with preparation and supplies (if needed). Challenge yourself, step outside your comfort zone and go do it (or in the case of some of the ideas, say no and don't do things).

When you are in relationships with people, know that your list will not be the same as others and that's a good thing. Do not hesitate to do this assessment with your spouse, parents, best friends, co-workers, or older children, each filling it out separately and then coming together to compare notes. If you can find common ideas you already love doing (✓+) or ones you are interested in and circled with a check mark, do those together.

The good news is that even ones which are negative when you first do this assessment, with practice and commitment, you can turn them into self-care skills that full your mind and soul. But if you are at a place where you need strong self-care skills, you do not need to be focusing on that yet.

In the end, let this simply be a guide but not another rule book that you have to stress over and then look ability for self-care. And do not hesitate in a year or two to come back and fill it out again.

Traditional

- Go out and visit a friend.
- Remember a sport, music instrument, or other activity that you loved and forgot about. Look to either join a group or find someone you can practice with.
- Pick up an old hobby and invest extra time in it, like drawing, horticulture, or photography.
- Go for a walk or hike by yourself or with your animal to clear your head. Clinically, this can have mildly similar effects as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing.
- Roast your own coffee. Be mindful of the process and take pride in what you make.
- Practice developing patience and relaxed breathing while brewing coffee and as it cools to a temperature you can drink it.
- Do something soothing. Light a candle, pet a cat, work on your garden, give yourself a hand massage, play relaxing music.
- Find a podcast you can enjoy and dedicate some time to it during tasks like mowing or chores to listen.
- Take a nap.
- Write in your journal.
- Create your to-do list for the day. When it is written down and not the next thing that needs done, don't worry about it.
- Go to a counselor.

Prayer

- Pray without ceasing
- Practice breath prayers.
- Confession. This may be a very rehearsed ritual within some denominations, others may simply be between you and God. Even as Christians, it's encouraged you have someone you can trust in your life that you can share this heavy burden with.
- Dedicate a time of prayer, at the beginning of the day can start your day off with positivity, with a prayer time of giving thanks. This can be a regular routine that has overlap, but also forcing yourself to identify new things to be thankful for.
- Develop a family tradition (whether by yourself or with others) to pray before every meal
- Join your church's prayer email and dedicate a couple of minutes to pray for one of the families.
- Go to your church and pray over the sanctuary.
- Walk a prayer Labyrinth, praying for your family, church, community, or nation.
- Write a letter of prayer, thanksgiving, and support to a missionary you or your church supports.
- Write a letter to God.
- Create a prayer journal.
- Create a routine where you pray about the thing you are doing next, inviting God into the routine, the small things, as well as the big stuff. On our way to work, as we make lunch, or to go have a tough conversation with someone.
- If you or a loved one struggle with mental illness symptoms, come up with pre-written prayers that you can consistently go to when you can't think of what to pray for. Put them on the fridge, glovebox of your car, or nightstand.
- Memorize the Lord's Prayer. (Matthew 6:5-15)
- Develop prayer in working with your pastor or using a resource like Richard Foster's Prayer.⁵
- Fast with a pastor, small group, or discipler. During that time of fasting from food or other vice, say a quick prayer every time you have an urge to break the fast. When you do officially break the fast, break it in community.

⁵ Foster, Richard J., *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. 1992.

Scripture

- Read your Bible for 5 minutes not connected to a devotional
- Use a devotional, whether a book you get from the Christian bookstore or on YouVersion, to guide morning or evening Scripture
- Memorize one Bible verse that is important to you.
- Walk the Stations of the Cross, at each station reading the Bible passage and imagine the scene with all your senses.
- Create a place for yourself to read the Bible. Make it a place where you can focus, good lighting and comfortable, but something you can access regularly. Spend time making this place what you need.
- Read through Proverbs every month.
- Join with a discipler, spouse, pastor, or friend to read through the whole Bible in one year. Take time to discuss what you have read, including your favorite and least favorite parts.
- Find a book of the Bible you know the least about and read through it with a commentary.
- Audit (i.e. take a class without getting the credits, meaning it's cheaper) a Bible or theology class at college to increase your Scripture knowledge.
- Use an app on your phone like Abide⁶, Pray.com⁷ or Calm⁸ to fall asleep listening to Scripture.
- Try out something like Classroom by BibleProject which are free online graduate-level Bible classes.
- Finding Scripture that can go with your prayer time. Here are a couple to start you off (Mark 1:35, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, 1 John 5:15)
- Take a hermeneutics class in college or at your church to better study how to connect points of the Bible.
- Take a Greek or Hebrew class in order to read the original text.
- Go through the sermon notes, expounding upon the Scripture referenced. Dive deeper with questions to ask your pastor, discipler, or elder/deacon committee for more understanding.
- Ask the pastor for reflective questions or other literary authors on the topic or Scripture presented and review those.
- Visualize what you read in the Bible or your sermons. There are whole communities on Creative Church Notes⁹ on how to do this.

⁶ <https://abide.co>

⁷ <https://www.pray.com>

⁸ <https://www.calm.com>

⁹ <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/krystalschurchnotes>

¹⁰ "The Enneagram Personality Test."

<https://www.truity.com/test/enneagram-personality-test>

Discipleship

- Find someone who can disciple you.
- Talk with your church leadership to find someone who you can disciple.
- Attend a church service and when over, go deeper into the message with supplemental Scripture and references.
- Go backpacking or camping with your discipleship group or discipler.
- Look at personality assessments (i.e. Enneagram¹⁰ or DISC¹¹) to take within discipleship.
- Allow yourself to identify possible strengths and growth areas for yourself. Request your discipler to identify these separately as well and discuss them together.
- Write down your salvation story.
- Do something exciting. Maybe you go hike to watch the sunrise or white water rafting with others. Afterwards, praise God for what He has done for you and your community.
- Find a small group/Bible study you can regularly attend
- Attend Celebrate Recovery.
- Start a mental health small group that is Scripture based. Need help? Check out FreshHope's¹² ongoing group curriculum or Grace Alliance's¹³ Living Grace or Thrive curriculum
- Share Jesus with someone who has been on your heart.
- Find a physical activity that you have never really practiced (tennis, basketball, etc) and then find a friend who you can join in and support you.
- Seek out forgiveness in past wounds you have committed as well as forgiveness on wounds you have from others that you have not let go and continued to suffer with. For some toxic relationships or potentially domestically violent relationship, this forgiveness may be done through a letter that is never delivered but offered up to God.

¹¹ John Wiley & Sons, Inc, "DiSC Profile."

<https://www.discprofile.com>

¹² Fresh Hope for Mental Health. <https://freshhope.us/fh-groups/start-a-group>

¹³ Mental Health Grace Alliance.

<https://mentalhealthgracealliance.org/store>

Worship

- ❑ Practice 5 minutes of random worship to God in your daily life that is not part of quiet time or devotionals
- ❑ Try out for the worship team
- ❑ Find your song, poem, or form of worship that connects you to God in this season of life
- ❑ Create a small group for your church around a specific hobby you have that you want to share in a Christian environment or open to the community in order to teach people and share Jesus.
- ❑ Play worship music while taking a bath or doing cardio exercise.
- ❑ Laugh. God has designed us to love laughter. Whether it is a YouTube video of a baby giggling, hang out with funny friends, or find a Christian comedian, find something that will create those endorphins.
- ❑ Write on a post-it note how God sees you and include Scriptures such as Romans 8:38-39. Put them up on your bathroom mirror or your room's dresser.
- ❑ Take communion with your small group, pastoral team, or discipler. Make it more than just a process, but an intimate time of worship, even if it is only two of you.
- ❑ Define what grace has meant in your life: before salvation, since then, and now. Grace for you from God and grace to others from you. Learn more about grace and how you can rely on God more.
- ❑ Find joy. Not happiness in a good movie. Not contentment in a good meal. Not rest in a good sunset. It's not a thought, an emotion, an object, or a single event. There you will find God and he may have been leading you the whole time.
- ❑ Find an alternative expression of worship that you would want to practice on your own. This can include stillness, dancing, expression through art, generosity, etc. If you need a more thorough list, talk with a pastor or discipler for more.

Acts of Service

- ❑ Write a letter to someone on your pastoral team, telling them you are praying for them. Highlight a point that stands out as a strength you see in them.
- ❑ Write a letter to someone who you know has asked for prayer.
- ❑ Write a letter to or call one of the widowed or orphaned in your community not connected to your church.
- ❑ Write a letter to a church volunteer thanking them for their time.
- ❑ Make something (scarves, drawings for people to color, Christmas cards) to give to local domestic violence shelters or foster care children.
- ❑ Create a scrapbook with pictures for your family or even for your church's youth group. If you have time and dedication, offer to do a congregation member who is a high school senior's scrapbook.
- ❑ Look to serve your community at a soup outside times like Christmas or Easter. Maybe have your children or the church youth group join in.
- ❑ Find a local non-profit in your community that you can bless. Offer landscaping, services for those in need, or fixing up areas. One example is find a local NAMI chapter to offer help.
- ❑ Volunteer to serve in a ministry that the church needs and find ways it can fill emotional or social needs.
- ❑ Find a local college student attending your church who may need support.
- ❑ Practice cooking in crock pots or soups that you may be able to make or give recipes and supplies to those who are hurting (lost a job, had a newborn child, lost a loved one)
- ❑ Donate blood. While giving, pray for the medical team that will be using it and the individual(s) who will be receiving. Pray for healing, for wisdom, and that all may find Jesus in a miracle or power of God in the moment.
- ❑ Create or volunteer for a respite program for young parents which allow them to go out. If your church has a strong support for hidden and visible disabilities, consider a program like Nathaniel's Hope's Buddy Break¹⁴ program.
- ❑ Joni and Friends¹⁵ and a campaign called *Until His House Is Full* that helps put into perspective disability, poverty, and despair from an international perspective. Spending time researching and investing personally, even if not monetarily, can be powerful and motivating.

¹⁴ <https://nathanielshope.org/our-programs/buddy-break>

¹⁵ <https://www.joniandfriends.org>

Good Stewardship

- ❑ Begin to workout, something simple but productive.
- ❑ Find rest, make sure you are setting good boundaries with your sleep.
- ❑ Take care of your body with healthy eating. Do not hear this as doing a diet but add one healthy thing or remove one thing that needs to stop being eaten. Drink plenty of water.
- ❑ Take care of your body with exercise. Whether it is doing a walking program, lifting weights, or swimming. Remember, your body is a temple.
- ❑ Take care of your body with your personal care. Go to get a check-up, make sure you are
- ❑ Practice taking breaks that are intentional. In the busyness of raising kids, working in an office, or doing construction work, take a five-minute break to not think about work. Stretch, pray, get some water, go for a walk. Not for the sake of being healthy, though that is a bonus, but for the need to take a break and mentally declutter.
- ❑ Say no to something that is a distraction and not adding value to you or God's calling for you.
- ❑ Say no to something in order to leave margin in your life for unexpected opportunities to serve someone you care about, serve someone in need, or face a season where extra self-care is needed.
- ❑ Attend a marriage retreat, conference, or enrichment. (example: Prepare-Enrich can be done at any time)
- ❑ Call a crisis or suicide hotline if you are in need of the resource, to talk to someone.
- ❑ Call a local 2-1-1 line for possible mental health resources in your area.
- ❑ Learn more. If you need to read to develop new work skills, read and grow your craft, but on your own time. Need to take a masterclass or college class to learn, do it. Give yourself permission to learn and grow.
- ❑ Learn for fun. Maybe take up a cooking class, learn to draw, practice archery, or do programming. Stretch your mind. We know that finding new, fun activities expand positive sense of self and finds more community. It also helps make Christians better and better at your job or parenting.
- ❑ Take a Sabbatical. Not a vacation though you may need to use vacation time, but a Sabbatical where you are working on your relationship with God and continuing to build up the Church yet stepping away from your time at work.
- ❑ Make sure to keep the Sabbath holy for you to God.

At this point, I hope you have been able to go through the checklist and may have found some things that will help you integrate mental health skills with your faith. But having skills does not magically fix your problems. As I stated before, you will need to practice these skills. Just as with every skill we learn, whether a sport, a musical instrument, or riding a bicycle, we need to practice. We do not become Mozart or Michael Jordan within a couple of days nor should we expect our self-care to dramatically shift overnight. God can certainly work miracles, but we must also create disciplines within ourselves.

Some questions to help you as you go along in your self-care journey that may help you go deeper into your relationship with God and care for yourself days, weeks, or months after you start to make changes for yourself:

1. How is God being honoured in what I am doing and am I able to shine my light for Him more now?
2. Who can I bring in for support and accountability (spouse, parent, counselor, pastor, friend, family member, or colleague) to join me in practicing as I practice good self-care?
3. If one skill is moderately working, which other self-care skill can I practice that may be more effective?
4. If I am missing the skills I've identified as wanting to do during the day, what ways of reminding myself can I incorporate that work for me?

Lastly, do not forget why you wanted to make this change and keep it close to you. We can find ourselves improving and losing motivation, get frustrated when a technique may not be working out the way we want, or tired of practicing the same thing repeatedly. Remembering why you decided you needed to make a change is important not only when you start, but through the whole process.

I would like to leave you with the Prayer of God's equipping presents from Hebrews as you go forth:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

—Hebrews 13:20–21 (NIV)