

Your 4-Step Guide to Biblical Self-Care

When I was much younger, I heard preachers say, “I’d rather burn out for God, than rust out for the devil.” It sounded true enough; but—setting aside the false dichotomy for a moment—there is no biblical basis for it.

Give all for Christ? It’s there.

Dying for the faith? It’s there.

Spend our energy for kingdom purposes? Yes, it’s there.

Working ourselves into an early grave? Failing to take care of ourselves? Burning the candle at both ends and melting the middle? Not there.

It’s clear that extreme situations call for extreme sacrifice, and in those situations, believers live at the breaking point and often die there. But, most of us do not see those extremes. Rather, we give-in to outside ministry expectations, self-pressure, self-promotion, and workaholism which lead to poor health and, sometimes, early death.

Self-care is not flexing in front of a mirror alternately kissing each bicep. Or, if applicable, wishing you had biceps to kiss. Self-care, rightly understood, is not an inflated sense of self-importance, or selfishness that keeps us from serving others. Instead, self-care, is a realistic view of how to take care of the only bodies we have in this life; bodies which house our minds and our souls.

Self-care is the physical, emotional and spiritual equivalent of automobile maintenance. Change the oil, check the transmission fluid, check the air-pressure, and get weird noises checked out, then your car or truck should last. Ignore

the “clunk, clunk” or the smoking tailpipe long enough and expect a costly repair later.

Hopefully, the following reminders will help us not to overlook things we often do.

Eat Right

When I was young with light-speed metabolism, I gave not a thought to what I ate. Snickers, SweetTarts, jelly beans, you name it, and I ate it. Sadly, I did not give up this diet as I got older. I have probably eaten more processed sugar in my life than all the kids at your church’s last ten harvest festivals. I could regularly eat a quarter-pounder with cheese, large fries and a drink a shake while driving a 5-speed Datsun company truck and never spill a thing or gain a pound.

To put it bluntly: I treated the temple of the Holy Spirit like a restaurant dumpster.

I do not have a miracle, “I started eating salads, lost weight, and feel great,” testimony. But, I am eating right because good food is the first key to good health. Hippocrates is widely quoted: “Let food be thy medicine, and medicine by thy food.”

This is sound advice for every pastor or church leader.

Exercise Right

Wrestling with God is fine when wrestling is needed. But hiking, rowing, swimming or simply talking with God are OK, too. After all, we only have two thighs, and if God touches both of them, even limping is hard to come by.

You can join a gym without becoming a gym-rat. If you do not have a lot of money, a good pair of walking or running shoes is a great investment. Pushups and sit-ups can be done in the discomfort of your own home. If you cannot buy the Charles

Atlas kit once advertised in comic books, you can get a couple of dumbbells to use in the basement or bedroom.

Most of us are not training for the Olympics, but we are training for long-haul health. We can't ignore it. The Bible does not talk much about exercise, but it didn't need to. Biblical characters walked, herded and gardened all the time. Exercise was part of life. We should, as much as possible, adopt that mindset.

Relax Right

I have openly confessed my aversion to taking a Sabbath. I am not averse because I hate a day off. I am averse because I feel guilty if I am doing nothing, and I don't like feeling guilty.

I love the idea of spending an afternoon watching college hoops, but if I am not reading a book related to ministry, or sending emails or texting a life group leader, I feel guilty—as though I am wasting time or being lazy.

A day of rest does not imply a day of sleep; rest is more than that. It means to stop for a while to let your body, soul, mind and spirit catch up with each other. Without rest, we cannot recharge, and without recharging, we become like a spent battery: good for nothing except to be trodden under foot of man.

Sleep Right

I am an early riser and, apparently, it is only getting worse the older I get. Most mornings, I awake before my 4:00 a.m. alarm. Some mornings it's an hour before. I cannot sleep in on weekends. Only after the most strenuous weeks would I sleep until 5:00 a.m. on a Saturday.

People who talk about “getting up early today, it was like 6:00” make me laugh.

To compensate for my early rising, I go to bed early. It is a running joke with my friends that any text message after 8:00 or 8:30 p.m. may go unanswered until the next morning. Early the next morning.

Sleep is essential to optimal functioning, but sometimes it is hard to come by. During a recent busy stretch, I woke several nights in a row very, very early, my mind spinning with things needing to be done. Sleep is so important that if I wake up in the middle of the night two nights in a row, unable to go back to sleep, the third night I take a sleep aid. Certain herbal teas help me sleep well, as does melatonin.

Self-care is not unspiritual or unbiblical. I argue it is both spiritual and biblical.

Neither rusting out nor wearing out is of God. But, avoiding one in *fear* of the other is itself unwise. We should practice self-care not for fear of extremes, but because it manifests this truth: we belong to God—body, soul, mind and spirit. And we can love God better with each if we are taking care of them as we should. {eoa}

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