

## Jesus is the Model of Self-Care

If you Google “self-care,” the sheer magnitude of hits you receive would be so overwhelming that it would send you reeling for a warm bath and a yoga mat. Don’t ask me how I know.

The idea of self-care has become more trendy in recent years because of Millennials and their tendency towards having greater emotional intelligence than generations past. The generation that has been repeatedly asked, “Honey, how do you FEEL?” has also resulted in the generation most likely to listen to itself and seek to meet its own needs. And there is a lot that the rest of us can learn from that.

Most people under-estimate and downplay the amount and effect of stress in their lives. Human beings are under a lot of stress in the course of their everyday lives – from getting to work on time, getting the kids ready and out the door to school, helping children with homework, accommodating the unexpected car breakdown and ensuing expense. Much of our stress is self-imposed. Americans value busyness, often equating it with being useful and productive. But we tend to put ourselves on the back burner and prioritize everything else before ourselves. In fact, if something gets eliminated from the to-do list, it’s probably you!

Burning the candle at both ends can result in burnout. Burnout, both personal and professional, can look a lot like depression and anxiety. Burnout has also been defined as “a progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions” (Edelwich and Brodsky). Psychiatrist James Gill says that “helping people can be extremely hazardous to your physical and mental health.” People could be those you live with or those you work with and for.

According to the University of Buffalo (NY) School of Social Work, “self-care refers to activities and practices that we can engage in on a regular basis to reduce stress and maintain and enhance our short- and longer-term health and well-being.” There are five domains of self-care: taking care of physical and psychological health; managing and reducing stress; honoring emotional and spiritual needs; fostering and sustaining relationships; and achieving an equilibrium across one’s personal, school, and work lives. For some of you, the idea of squeezing one more thing into your already busy day sounds like more stress. The blog *Thought Catalogue* described self-care well when Brianna Wiest stated: “True self-care is not salt baths and chocolate cake, it is making the choice to [build a life you don’t need to regularly escape from](#).” When is the last time you slowed down? When is the last time you did NOTHING? Even just for 10 minutes? No phone, no television, no book, no magazine, no people, no laundry – just you and your thoughts?

Whether you realize it or not, you already know how to relax and relieve your stress. You have a tool that works for you, but you might not be using it enough. And sometimes we don’t use our resources because we don’t believe we deserve it. But you

are worth it – take care of yourself! For those of us who are caregivers – and there are a lot of us out there – we can't effectively take care of others until we are well cared for, body, mind, and spirit. What helps you unwind? What helps you put something out of your mind?

- Take a walk
- Go for a bike ride
- Read a book
- Watch TV
- Cooking
- Pray
- Spend time quietly, by yourself
- Play a game

Jesus, as usual, was the perfect model of self-care. Jesus often removed Himself from the center of action – feeding thousands with two fish and five loaves, healing the sick and wounded, casting out demons, being pulled this way and that – and went to a lonely place to pray. He replenished Himself with time alone with His Heavenly Father, he rested, and he re-energized. Our resources may look different in 2018, but the idea is the same.

Some general guidelines to self-care include: making sure the activity you engage in is healthy and is not damaging yourself or others; knowing when and how you are going to use your relaxation tool (have a plan); having options in case one doesn't feel right to you in the moment; and varying the relaxation and de-stressing technique. **TIP:** variety in life is a sure way to avoid burnout and stress.

Other ideas that might not already be a part of your life (if you have time to add something new):

- Yoga
- Volunteering
- Exercise
- Take care of your feet
- Improve your diet
- Meditation
- Deep and calming breathing

We all experience stress. Stress is a normal part of life and cannot always be avoided. Stress can also be very motivating and healthy at times. It's what we do with stress (or any emotion, for that matter) that defines healthy or unhealthy. If you are managing your stress in healthy and positive ways, these are some of the behaviors you are probably engaging in, on a regular basis:

- Physical activity at least three times a week for 30 minutes each day
- Six to eight hours of sleep every night
- Good eating habits
- Time to relax
- Maintaining a sense of humor
- Play
- Maintaining healthy rituals and routines

- Positive thinking
- Spending time with family
- Spending time with friends
- Making plans for the future
- Figuring out ways to manage stress
- Rewarding yourself for your accomplishments

Sometimes, even armed with the best information and intentions, we don't handle stress the best. That's okay. But it's important to know that a repeated pattern of unhealthy behaviors and negative self-care can result in dis-ease to our body, mind, and spirit.

These behaviors might look like:

- Smoking/using tobacco
- Drinking a lot of coffee or caffeinated drinks (more than 2-3 cups per day)
- Drinking alcohol (more than recommended levels of 1-2 per day)
- Overusing over-the-counter medications
- Overeating or under eating
- Spending too much money (e.g., do you have a lot of credit card debt and have trouble making payments?)
- Abusing/overusing tranquilizers or other over-the-counter medications
- Watching too much television (more than 3-4 hours per day)
- Having angry outbursts
- Taking illegal drugs
- Withdrawing from people
- Ignoring or denying stress symptoms
- Engaging in self-destructive relationships

For more information, or to talk to a counselor, go to [www.catholiccharitiesdubuque.org/catholic-charities-services/counseling-services](http://www.catholiccharitiesdubuque.org/catholic-charities-services/counseling-services), or call 800-772-2758.

### **Resources**

Nouwen, Henri J. *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*. Ave Maria Press, 1974

Wicks, Robert J. *The Resilient Clinician*. Oxford University Press. 2008

[https://www.ted.com/playlists/299/the\\_importance\\_of\\_self\\_care](https://www.ted.com/playlists/299/the_importance_of_self_care) – this includes some really good talks on slowing down, mindfulness, and taking care of your emotions

<https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit/introduction-to-self-care.html> – this website is aimed at social work students, but has wonderful resources for all types of adults