

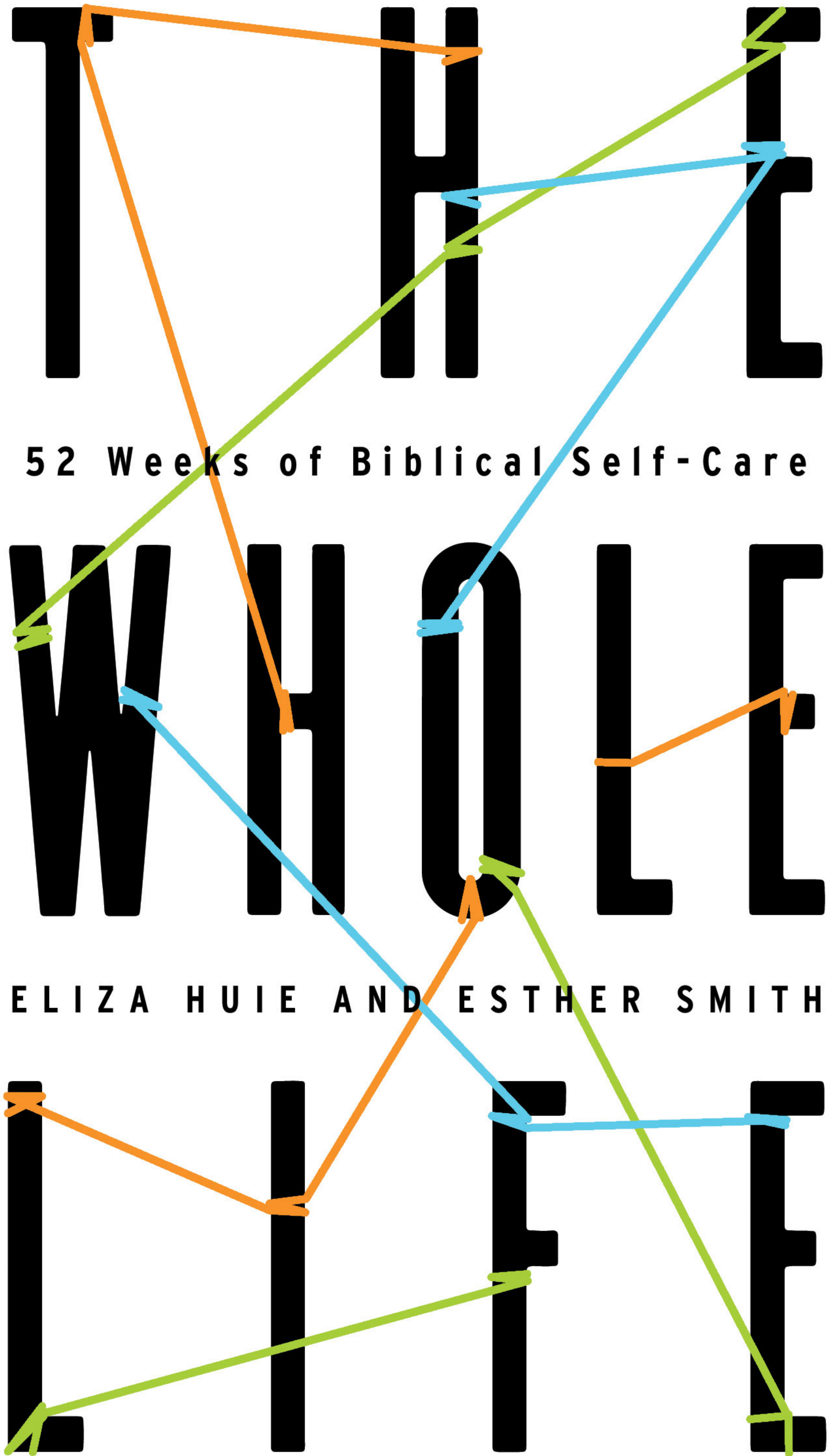
T H E

52 Weeks of Biblical Self-Care

W H O L E

ELIZA HUIE AND ESTHER SMITH

L I F E



“We could all use some help in our devotions. What sets this book apart is its holistic approach to the care of one’s own soul. While underscoring God’s supremacy in our lives, we are also encouraged in this weekly format to consider the emotional, relational, and embodied aspects of our lives that are often overlooked. This book would also make a great resource for counselees!”

Eric L. Johnson, Professor of Christian Psychology, Gideon Institute of Christian Psychology & Counseling, Houston Baptist University

“Those who devote their lives to the care of others often fail to properly care for themselves. In their timely and needed book, Eliza and Esther offer Scripture-saturated, practical wisdom for self-care. They carefully recast our understanding of self-care as a biblically rooted habit and offer guidance on how to make self-care a life-giving practice. This book contains fifty-two weeks of soul-feeding content and is a gift to the care of God’s children!”

Andrew Dealy, Director of Soul Care and Executive Director, The Austin Stone Counseling Center, The Austin Stone Community Church

“When we hear about self-care, our first reaction is often to ask, ‘Should we really care for ourselves? Shouldn’t our focus be exclusively on sacrificial care for others?’ I appreciate Eliza Huie and Esther Smith’s biblically-based definition of self-care: ‘the practice of drawing on divinely-given resources to steward our whole lives for personal enrichment, the good of others, and the glory of God.’ In *The Whole Life*, they comprehensively and compassionately help readers to steward their lives so that they can live a lifetime of ministry to others to the glory of God.”

Bob Kellemen, Academic Dean, Dean of Students, and Professor of Biblical Counseling, Faith Bible Seminary, Lafayette, Indiana

“If you are traveling on a plane, you are well aware of the instructions before takeoff: place the oxygen mask on your face before you help your child. That seems so counterintuitive, but the point is this; if you don’t get oxygen first, you won’t be able to help another person! That is what this book is about. It is about stewarding your body and soul so that you can be most useful to others. Stewardship is a word in Scripture that often is only associated with money. But the fact is, stewardship is about everything God has given us, including our body and soul. Eliza and Esther wisely call us to pay attention to ways we must steward these gifts.”

Timothy S. Lane, President, Institute for Pastoral Care and Tim Lane & Associates; author of *Unstuck: A Nine-Step Journey to Change that Lasts*; coauthor of *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* and *How People Change*

“*The Whole Life* provides a grace-filled and compelling vision for Christian self-care. All of us who struggle to live as holistic disciples should take this fifty-two-week journey toward caring for our bodies and souls in a gospel-saturated

way. The exercises are simple and thought-provoking, and every week serves as a reminder of the beauty of honoring and enjoying God in every area of life.”

Beth M. Broom, LPC Supervisor and Care Minister, The Village Church, Denton

“This book is thoughtfully written, practically presented, theologically-rich, hope-filled, and robustly relevant. As a pastor, professor, counselor, and business owner, my heart resonated with all of it. The weekly format drew me in and kept me focused on first things being first, while creating such an engaging format for my already busy yet productive life. I’d highly recommend pastors, professors, ministry leaders, business owners, and volunteers to read it.”

Dwayne R. Bond, Lead Pastor, Wellspring Church; owner of Proximus Group, LLC

“Practical, biblical, and insightful, *The Whole Life* is a needed reminder for those of us who struggle with self-care that the Lord calls us to steward our lives with intentionality, wisdom, and a sensitivity to the Spirit’s leading. The questions and exercises in each chapter shed necessary light on areas I’ve long neglected and encouraged me to care for my body, mind, and soul, both to glorify God and to better serve others. If you feel overworked, stressed, and can’t figure out what to do about it, this book is for you!”

Vaneetha Rendall Risner, Author of *Walking Through Fire: A Memoir of Loss and Redemption*

“When you think of self-care, do you immediately feel guilty for even thinking about it? *The Whole Life* not only shows the necessity of self-care, but also the utter biblical grounding for this idea of stewarding all of your life as a gift from God to be used in service to love others. Esther and Eliza do a remarkable job in giving you a place to practice self-care in a biblically healthy way. I would recommend this to every counselor, pastor, and people-helper.”

Cache Barnes, Executive Director, Redemption: Twin Cities

“The term *self-care* has certainly become an elusive buzzword in today’s society. It’s something I prescribe for others while often failing to consistently engage in myself. In *The Whole Life*, Eliza and Esther journey with you for a year and provide weekly, practical steps to implement this practice. They use a biblical approach to remind you that caring for the spirit, soul, and body is not selfish, but simply stewardship.”

Renee Davis, Clinical Psychologist

“God has entrusted us all to be good stewards of our bodies, emotions, and relationships. In *The Whole Life*, Eliza Huie and Esther Smith lay out a foundation for the kind of biblical self-care that is necessary to fuel a life lived wholly for the glory of God. I invite everyone experiencing exhaustion or burnout to pick up this book and put its contents into practice!”

Walter Shaw, Blogger at *WTSreads*

THE WHOLE LIFE

52 WEEKS OF BIBLICAL SELF-CARE

Eliza Huie and Esther Smith



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INTRODUCTION

Is your life overscheduled? Is your health telling you to take a break? Are you stressed or exhausted but feel guilty slowing down? Is the idea of caring for yourself a foreign concept? Or maybe the idea of setting aside time for yourself makes you feel vaguely guilty. Your commitment to follow Christ encourages you to give selflessly, but perhaps you are starting to wonder if you have sacrificed to your own demise. If any of this sounds like we have somehow read your mail or have been spying on your world, we invite you to join us on this journey of caring for yourself.

This book is for Christians who are committed to loving God and loving others; it is for believers who pour their lives out in sacrificial service. You might be a parent or caretaker serving those within your own household. You may spend your workdays contributing to the good and well-being of others as a medical professional, first responder, social worker, teacher, business owner, or executive. Perhaps you are a pastor, counselor, Bible study leader, or church volunteer who selflessly gives of your time and energy. No matter your particular role, you pour yourself out until you have almost nothing left.

We've been there too. Our stories below reveal how important self-care is in stewarding our whole life for the good of others and the glory of God.

ELIZA'S STORY

There are many ways to describe me. Personality tests label me as the entrepreneur, an extrovert, the giver, a Myers-Briggs type ENFJ, or Enneagram type Three. I've been described as driven. I naturally wake up early and hit the day running. I love creating new ventures and improving on others. I love saying yes and hate saying no to opportunity. And "wait" certainly is a four-letter word.

Slowing down is not easy for me. Because of this, I can neglect the good things God has given me that bring refreshment and replenishment. Things like rest, silence, being creative, enjoying nature, engaging with friends, pausing to be present, and other things that get lost in the hurry of life. A few years ago, the reality of this pace hit me hard, and I started constantly feeling overwhelmed. The stress manifested itself in ways I felt in my entire body.

I could not ignore the physical realities and the decline in my health. I also was dealing with the spiritual and emotional impact the pace and demands were having on me. I came to realize I could not keep up by just working harder. Something had to change.

God, in his kindness, graciously met me in that season and taught me important lessons I will never forget. In the pages of this book, I will share some of these lessons that yielded valuable life changes. I am still a doer and a goer, but with God's help, I do and go with a better understanding of balance and God's grace. However, I easily drift. The pull is strong to return to a frenetic pace of life.

Someone once told me, "Write the book you want to read." For me, this project goes beyond that advice. This is the book I *need* to read! So, while I write this book for you, I need this book as well. I need the reminders. I need the direction. I need the rhythms. It is a continual call back to the care I so easily neglect. This book honors our humanity, our limits, and the God who created them. I trust it will serve you as we journey together into what it means to care for the person who is in your life every moment of every day—you.

ESTHER'S STORY

Over ten years ago, my life was interrupted by chronic pain and autoimmune illness. It soon became apparent that I would need to make major life adjustments to manage my symptoms. After years of searching for answers, I was diagnosed with lupus, and since then, I have found it necessary to slow down and revolve much of my daily life around self-care.

In general, I am good at self-care. Even as I write that sentence, I'm tempted to wonder if I am fooling myself. Isn't being "good at self-care" just code for being lazy or selfish? On occasion, doubts like these still linger in the back of my mind, but nowadays, these doubts happen much less often.

Self-care doesn't feel like a choice for me. It's more of a life necessity. This has led me to spend a lot of time considering what God says about this topic, and over the years, I have found a great deal of freedom to prioritize caring for my body and my soul. I prioritize rest, say no to things I want to do, plan my schedule around medical appointments, and simplify daily tasks when they start to feel detrimental to my body. I am still figuring out the balance between living my life and succumbing to the rest my body needs. What I do know for sure is that without a focus on self-care, my body would deteriorate, and I would struggle to continue meeting my responsibilities each day.

On those days when I would rather push through to the detriment of my health, I need to be reminded that taking care of myself is good and honors God. I also need to be reminded that self-care isn't about me. As you will soon read in the coming pages, self-care is about maximizing the ways God can work through me—and you—for other people, and ultimately, his glory.

YOUR STORY

We are different people with different stories, but we have each discovered a need for self-care that is one and the same. You also

have a unique story, and we think you will discover your need is similar to ours. We all need self-care.

Over the next year, you will consider truths from Scripture that relate to stewarding your resources in six areas: your spiritual life, your physical life, your purposeful approach to life, your community life, your work life, and your life of rest. Each week includes a thoughtful entry on a self-care topic. Following each entry, you will find a **Gospel Spotlight** intended to point you to Jesus. An **Action and Application** section will help you implement practical self-care strategies for the good of your spiritual, emotional, physical, and relational well-being. You will also find a **Guided Journaling** section that will enable you to engage the content more personally. We encourage you to have a designated place such as a journal or note in your phone for writing out your thoughts and personal applications.

While this book is designed to be worked through on your own, it is also incredibly valuable to read with others. Consider asking someone to join you on this journey. Who in your life might benefit from observing a year of whole-life stewardship? For example, could you gather a group of friends together for mutual accountability? Perhaps your ministry team, fellow classmates, or family members would benefit from this discussion as well. Practicing self-care in community provides helpful support as you engage challenging topics and consider difficult changes.

Our hope is that this book becomes a gift to you and expands your understanding of how truly valuable self-care is to yourself and others. At one point when we attended the same church, the founding pastor, Michael Crawford, was known to say these words: “We take care of ourselves so we can love well and live well.” He is right. As you use this book and focus on stewarding your whole life, we pray it inspires a lifelong commitment to self-care that increases your capacity to love others. We pray it points you back to your Creator, who gives good gifts to steward for his glory.

SECTION 1
SPIRITUAL LIFE

WEEK 1

WHAT IS BIBLICAL SELF-CARE?

Take care of your body as if you were going to live forever; and take care of your soul as if you were going to die tomorrow.

Augustine

Embracing the idea of self-care can feel uncomfortable. The word isn't found in Scripture, and some Christians may wonder if self-care is contrary to a sacrificial life. Doesn't the Bible call us to put the care of others first? Won't attending to self-care lead to selfishness? These common questions and concerns often arise when we don't consider a biblical understanding of the principles behind self-care.

Self-care is an extrabiblical word that contains essential biblical truth. We define biblical self-care as the practice of drawing on divinely given resources to steward our whole lives for personal enrichment, the good of others, and the glory of God. We don't practice self-care because it's trendy. We practice self-care because it's a biblical concept. We embrace self-care as a way to steward our souls, minds, bodies, and relationships. This whole-life stewardship is an act of obedience to God's call to love others as we love ourselves. The following concepts explain biblical self-care as seen in Scripture.

Biblical self-care is stewardship. We are called to steward everything God gives us. A steward manages and cares for resources. This stewardship principle goes beyond financial and material

resources. We are to be good stewards of God's varied graces, including ourselves (Luke 12:48; 2 Corinthians 9:6–15; 1 Peter 4:10). God gave us bodies that need care. He gave us souls that need attention. Scripture affirms the reality of human needs and does not discourage meeting those needs. Numerous places in the Bible describe, even encourage, paying appropriate attention to caring for ourselves (1 Kings 19:1–8; Matthew 15:32; Mark 6:31–32; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:29).

Biblical self-care is modeled by Jesus. Jesus is God in human flesh. In Scripture we see him give attention to his human needs. When he was hungry, he ate. When he was tired, he rested. When he needed time alone with the Father, he made this a priority. As the perfect man, his whole life was perfectly balanced. Not only did he model stewardship of his body, mind, soul, and relationships, he also encouraged others to do the same (Mark 1:35; 11:12; 12:31; John 4:6).

Biblical self-care is rooted in creation. We see this most clearly in the institution of the Sabbath in Genesis 2:1–3. Rest is part of our original created design and a key component of biblical self-care. From the beginning of time, God's divine intention was that we stop and pause from the demands of life and work. While rest refreshes our bodies, minds, souls, and relationships, it's also a proclamation of trust. We rest as an act of trust-filled worship, declaring God as our creator and sustainer. God intended these pauses to reaffirm in our hearts that he will supply all that we need as we obey the command to rest (Exodus 20:8–11; Philippians 4:19).

Biblical self-care is a blessing to others. Scripture teaches that we are to love one another (Romans 12:10) and do good to everyone (Galatians 6:10). As we give Christlike attention to our own needs, we are equipped to show Christlike love for others in need. God enriches us in every way so we can be generous in every way (2 Corinthians 9:11). Wisely caring for ourselves according to God's Word enables us to effectively pour ourselves into the lives of others.

Biblical self-care is tied to the gospel. As we have just seen, self-care is important because it helps us to love others well. Our love for others is motivated by the gospel. We love others because Jesus first loved us (1 John 4:7–11). The most important way we love others is by sharing with them the good news of what Jesus has done. Our ability to do this is tied to how well we care for ourselves. We fulfill the Great Commission in our bodies, with our minds, through our relationships, and as an outpouring of what Jesus has done for our own souls (Matthew 28:18–20; 2 Corinthians 5:18–21).

These concepts support self-care as an important priority for Christians. Sadly, believers are often left feeling guilty or ashamed for embracing practices of self-care. Taking time away for refreshment or spending money for things that encourage physical or emotional wellness are often seen as frivolous or selfish. Taking needed breaks from the demands of life to take a nap, read a good book, or take a walk are met with disapproval when progress is halted. In certain seasons of life, it may be more difficult to figure out how to practice self-care in a way that is biblical. We will address this more in Week 44 and Week 51. However, regardless of circumstances, believers should not be shamed when attending to their needs but rather encouraged to care for themselves.

Have these biblical truths challenged your perspective? This week you will assess your personal views on self-care and consider how God might be inviting you to change your approach to caring for yourself. To get the most out of the action and application sections we encourage you to engage each question prayerfully and attentively.

GOSPEL SPOTLIGHT

As important as self-care may be, it's not our most pressing need. What we need most is Jesus. In him we lack nothing (Psalm 23:1). He is the source of our physical, spiritual, emotional, and

relational health. We have nothing to offer others that we have not received from him (John 15:1–27).

ACTION AND APPLICATION

Spiritual: What message have you received from Christian teachers or other believers about self-care? How has that impacted your understanding of God's view of caring for yourself?

Emotional: What emotions come up when you think about practicing self-care? How do those emotions align with the concepts of biblical self-care stated above?

Physical: Scripture teaches that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Our bodies are to be used to bring God glory. How well do you take care of your body?

Relational: Have you experienced pushback in your relationships when you take time to care for yourself? Think about how you can address this tension biblically. Use the Scriptures from this week's reading to help you.

GUIDED JOURNALING

How well are you caring for yourself? On a scale of one to ten, give yourself a rating on how you are doing. One equals little to no self-care. Ten equals self-care is a regular part of your routine. Jot down your number. As you think about your rating, what changes do you feel compelled to make?

WEEK 2

TIME OUT WITH GOD

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Mark 1:35

As a counselor, one of the most unique opportunities to care for people took me (Eliza) to Fujinomiya, Japan. This small town sits at the base of Mount Fuji. It wasn't the drastically different culture and language that made this experience so unique. It was the fact that I was asked to counsel in a way I had never done before. In an effort to care for the missionaries serving in Japan, I was part of a small team providing counseling at a major missions conference. We had three days to offer one or two counseling sessions to the five hundred missionaries in attendance. Think speed dating meets counseling and you have a pretty good picture of what we were doing.

Our short trip consisted of early-morning starts and late-night endings. Considering Japan is thirteen time zones ahead of the United States, we were doing all of this in what our bodies thought was the middle of the night. By the time we got back to our rooms each night there wasn't much more we wanted to do than lie on the floor (quite literally in Japan) and sleep.

Before this trip, the Lord taught me something I would desperately need to apply during this time of jam-packed serving. The lesson came from the first chapter of Mark. It was the beginning

of Jesus's ministry on earth. He had become known for his authority over demons and his power to heal, and people were flocking to him en masse. Mark's description says, "the whole city was gathered together at the door" of the house where he was staying (Mark 1:33). They wanted his care. They needed his care.

The next day people were still coming. They were looking for the man who had the power to help and heal them. But Jesus was nowhere to be found. His disciples looked all over for him. The need was great. The people were pressing. Where was Jesus? We learn from Mark 1:35 that Jesus had gotten up very early in the morning to be alone and pray. In this act, Jesus models one of the most powerful principles of self-care. Pressing needs do not negate the importance of being alone in prayer to meet with God.

Jesus showed us that staying connected to the Father is vital no matter how demanding our lives may be. Time out with God fueled his ability to move forward and accomplish the mission God had ordained for him. He continued to engage fully in ministry but only after spending time alone with God.

At the base of Mount Fuji, Jesus's example became real for me. I woke up very early every morning. I wish I could say it was something more spiritual, but honestly, the jet lag woke me up before the sun each day. In these early morning hours before anyone else was awake and asking for my help, the first thing that came to my mind was Mark 1:35. I took very early morning walks to pray and be alone with the Father. I listened to God through his Word. Those times of prayer and meditation sustained me in a tremendously demanding time of ministry.

Life gets demanding. You may find yourself overwhelmed with juggling work, home, and serving. It may seem like there just isn't enough of you to go around. In times like these, we must commit all the more to taking time out to be alone with God. It may not be early in the morning. It could be late at night or in the middle of the day. The key is that we prioritize time

alone with God to spiritually care for ourselves in the midst of caring for others. We cannot properly pour out to others if we are empty.

GOSPEL SPOTLIGHT

When Jesus took time to be with the Father this was much more than him setting a good example for us. It also points to the reality of what the cross accomplished for every believer. Through Jesus, we have open access to the Father twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

ACTION AND APPLICATION

Spiritual: When your days are busy with serving or caring for others, do the demands of life fill all the spaces of your day? This week set aside a specific time to meet with God alone.

Emotional: Do emotional struggles increase when you don't prioritize time alone with God? What emotional cues could suggest you need to reprioritize time alone with God?

Physical: When demands are high it's easy to get distracted in our efforts to pray and read the Bible. Following the example of Jesus can help. This week try changing your physical location when you pray. Find an outside space or other place where you can be alone with God.

Relational: It's easy to forget that the context of our engagement with God is a relationship, and relationships require investment. Assess your relationship with God. What areas do you need to strengthen?

GUIDED JOURNALING

Read Acts 17:24–28 and use the passage to orient your heart. Journal specific ways you can prioritize time with God this week.