Self-Care for Resilience in Ministry

Self-care is not selfish; it is a wise form of self-denial in order to "finish the race." Our personal health impacts the health of our ministries. This session illustrates how ministry is uniquely taxing to our emotional, social and physical health. We will explore how our unique cultures and contexts may be working against healthy habits, and then practice some things we can do to help pace ourselves for fruitful ministries for a lifetime.

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I. What is healthy self-care?

> ➢ The routines and lifestyles that bring out the best in us.
> ➢ A rhythm of rest, restoration and relationships that build resilience into our lives.
> ➢ The discipline and discernment of wise stewardship of the life God has given us.
> ➢ The ongoing development of our whole person: the physical, intellectual, emotional, social (relationship to self, others, God) and moral. All 5 areas impact us spiritually.

Recent U.S. and Irish studies show that those in vocational ministry have some of the highest work-related stress and worst physical and emotional health of any profession. Recent U.S. and Canadian studies show pastors and clergy leaving vocational ministry at alarmingly high rates. Our 7-year study at Covenant Theological Seminary on what sustains pastors in ministry found self-care to be 1 of 5 areas required for staying in fruitful ministry.

A. Why do ministry leaders neglect self-care?

1. We are so busy that we are not self-aware.
2. We submit to unrealistic expectations placed on us by others.
3. We assume responsibility and overfunction to please people.
4. We deny the personal impact of being in a caring profession.
5. We pretend we can separate our physical and emotional life from "spiritual" matters.
6. Pride keeps us from respecting our own needs, failures, and limitations.
7. We minister out of guilt or to please an angry God, rather than as a <u>response</u> to our personal experience of the love and grace of God.

B. How does our lack of self-care impact others?

C. What stories do our cultures tell us about self-care?

<u>Some Harmful U.S. Idioms & Myths</u>	<u>My Culture's Harmful Idioms & Myths</u>
1. Life success and happiness is about achieving the right "balance."	
2. The sacred is separate from the secular.	
3. It is heroic to burn-out for a good cause.	
4. It is heroic to be self-sufficient.	
5. Long work hours increase productivity.	
6. Workaholism is a harmless necessity.	
7. Multitasking and using technology increase productivity.	
8. There is never enough money, time...	
9. Success is determined by counting the return on effort given to the task.	
10. Failure and error are not acceptable.	
11. People are defined by what they do.	

D. What might a biblical theology of self-care look like in action?

1. Remembering it is God who sends us, is with us, gifts us, and alone has the power to redeem   (Exodus 3-4; 1 Cor 1:26-31; 3:5-6, 12)

2. Finding our worth in Christ   (Psalm 139; John 15; 1Cor 15:9-10; Eph 1:3-6, 2:8-10)

3. Defining success as the growth in the fruit of God's grace in our lives and in the lives of those around us   (1 Sam 16:7; 1 Cor2:12-16)

4. Pursuing our own spiritual formation   (Joshua 1:8; Ezra 7:10; Matt 6:31-33)

5. Receiving mentoring and pastoral care ourselves (Gal 6:2; Phil 4:10; Heb 10:24-25)

6. Prioritizing our own learning and growth (Rom 12:1-2; Eph 4:11-16; Gal 5:22-23)

7. Acknowledging our needs for Sabbath rest, daily rest, care, companionship and prayer (Exodus 20:8; Matt 11:28-30, 14:22; Mark 3:7; Luke 5:15; 6:12; 9:10)

8. Prioritizing physical health and friendships (Gen 2:18; Eccl 4:9-12; Rom 6:5; 1 Cor 3:16)

II. Assessing Self-care: The Whole Person House Metaphor

Self-care is like updating the exterior and fixing the foundation to weather the storms of stress and to keep out the bugs and pollution of culture myths.

III. Healthy self-care requires social and emotional management. Ephesians 4:25-26

A. Ministry leadership involves regularly disappointing people.
Build an Expectations Chart with a column for each list: What are my responsibilities? Who has expectations on me? What are they expecting? How do I tend to respond?

B. We can disappoint with love, grace and truth via "differentiation:" the ability to build significant relationships and yet not have our behaviors determined by them. For example, to care for church members while not taking responsibility for their emotions and reactions and not being influenced by their approval or disapproval.

C. Our social/emotional health requires having intimate friends: supportive people who do not have conflicting loyalties with our interests, who understand our work and our pain, to whom we can tell anything safely, and with whom we can be honest and weak.

Suggested Readings:

Brown, Brené, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2010).

Burns, Bob, Tasha D. Chapman and Donald C. Guthrie; *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

Scazzero, Peter, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash A Revolution In Your Life In Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006).