

Self-Care

By Pastor Alan Utting

'Self-care is giving the world the best of you, instead of what's left of you.'
Katie Reed

Individual approaches to self-care are often influenced by personality traits and personal backgrounds, with certain personalities facing greater challenges than others. Assessments such as the Myers-Briggs test indicate that some individuals favour structured, methodical strategies, while others adopt a more adaptable approach. Both styles present distinct advantages and drawbacks; however, individuals can cultivate effective self-care skills irrespective of their personality type.

Biblical Perspective

'There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven' (Ecclesiastes 3v1).

'I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do' (John 17:4).

'Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil' (Ephesians 5: 15,16).

The Bible is strong on the concept of stewardship. A 'steward' is not a common word today, but it has the meaning of managing someone's property, often in their absence. As a steward will give account on how they managed their master's possessions, so we likewise will give an account on how we have used our time, energy and possessions when we stand before God almighty. Rewards will be given out accordingly.

Hindrances to managing yourself

1. The use of the internet and emails.
Reliance on the internet, messaging, and social media is rising. Spam fills inboxes as people compete for your attention, and easy access to information can lead to overload.
2. Interruptions.
Interruptions can be helpful or disruptive. Jesus often turned interruptions into opportunities but also valued solitude. I try to spend some quiet time daily at home, but isolating oneself completely means losing touch with others.
3. Being people centred.
Again, leaders must balance accessibility with a task-oriented focus. In structured societies, people often dislike lengthy calls and interviews, but neglecting healthy relationships is risky.
4. Not having a team.
Pastors, especially those leading smaller congregations, may be inclined to handle all responsibilities themselves. However, building a competent team where individuals contribute their unique skills can bring significant satisfaction to all involved. By learning strategies to establish an effective team, it ultimately leads to substantial and lasting benefits.

How to manage your time (especially if you are a pastor)

1. Set objectives or goals and write them down.
Ask yourself questions like:
 - a. What is our direction as a church, and what is my personal trajectory as an individual?
 - b. What strategies will I implement to achieve these objectives?
 - c. Which specific actions should I undertake to progress toward these goals?Consult your leaders and spouse (if you are married) for their input.
2. Discipline yourself.
 - a. Plan your message in advance rather than waiting until the last moment. The effort invested in preparing a message influences its effectiveness. Avoid attributing lack of preparation to external factors.
3. Plan your days, weeks and months ahead.
 - a. Utilise yearly planners to gain a comprehensive overview of upcoming commitments. Incorporating colour-coded markers can effectively highlight different and same activities scheduled throughout each month and across the year. This method may be adapted according to individual preferences to ensure optimal organisation.
 - b. When planning your week, schedule dedicated times for sermon preparation, administration, and interviews. I prepare talks in the morning and handle administration tasks or meetings in the afternoon.
 - c. Set a time to finish work each day, then complete essential tasks at home, and focus on activities that refresh you and strengthen relationships.
 - d. Flag emails e.g. red urgent, yellow under action. Reply at appropriate times and don't clear emails all the time unless you are an administrator.
4. **For appointments and detailed actions** to be taken.
Use *one* dairy or a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) electronic organiser.
Refer to these devices throughout the day for appointments and action plans.
5. **Write down task lists every day and refer to them.**
Some people struggle with this, but with persistence, it gets easier over time.
6. **Review your work constantly.**
This could motivate you or signal the need for a new approach. Consider consulting others and taking their advice.

Time Savers

1. Ask yourself, 'Why am I doing this?' If it doesn't help you reach your goals, it may be a waste of time.
2. Streamline decision-making; endless meetings and ongoing individual discussions are inefficient and exhausting. Congregational governance can hinder initiative, but churches operate more effectively when authority is delegated to trusted leaders. Major decisions should still be brought to the congregation for approval.

3. Say 'no' when needed.
4. Learn to delegate.
5. Collaborate with colleagues to discuss potential projects you are considering. The insights and suggestions generated through teamwork can be exceptionally valuable.
6. Plan regular retreats for prayer, renewal and hearing from God.
7. Preparing for meetings ahead of time can help maintain their focus and keep them concise.
8. Choose emails or phone calls where appropriate, but handle challenging situations face to face for better communication. Approach in person conversations prayerfully, thoughtfully and with care.

Note: Self-care improves our work.

'Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain' (1Corinthians 15:58).

Resources

John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*
Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spiritually*
Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*